NATION

IDFC staff involved in Rs 590 cr fraud

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BUSINESS

India's Saudi oil imports rise; Russian flow significant

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SPORTS

Alcaraz wins Qatar Open, thrashes Fils in an hour

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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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INDIA, US RESCHEDULE TRADE DEAL MEETING

Comes after US Supreme Court binned Trump's old tariffs

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

India and the US have decided to reschedule the proposed meeting of their chief negotiators, supposed to be held from Monday, to finalise the text for the interim trade pact, sources said on Sunday.

The Indian team was scheduled to start the three-day meeting on 23 February in in Washington. Joint Secretary in the Commerce Ministry, Darpan Jain, is the chief negotiator of India for this agreement.

"The two sides are of the view that the proposed visit of the Indian Chief Negotiator and the team be scheduled after each side has had the time to evaluate the latest developments and their implications. The meeting will be rescheduled at a mutually convenient date," Commerce Ministry sources said.

—FREEPIK

The development comes after the US Supreme Court's struck down President Donald Trump's import tariffs, which were imposed under an emergency law.

Trump responded to the verdict by first imposing 10 per cent tariffs on all countries on Friday. He hiked this on Saturday to 15 per cent.

Prior to the ruling on Trump's use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977, India had negotiated an 18 per cent tariff rate and agreed to finalise an interim trade pact.

The US had imposed 25 per cent reciprocal tariff on India in August 2025, and 25 per cent additional levies for buying Russian oil, taking the total to 50.

In return for lowering the tariffs, the US said that India would curb is imports of Russian oil and would slash tariffs on dozens of American-made products.

During 2021-25, the US was India's largest trading partner in goods. The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total exports, 6.22 per cent of its imports, and 10.73 per cent of its bilateral trade. —*PTI*

Garbage piled up in Bengaluru —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

DKS seeks 100 acre of farmer land to dump garbage

RAMANAGARA, 22 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar announced on Sunday that the government was looking to acquire 100 acres of land from willing farmers to dispose of garbage.

He said that farmers near forest or hilly areas within 40km of the City could provide land.

"If 5-6 farmers or builders near hilly or forest areas are willing to provide land, we are ready to acquire 100 acres of land at two different locations," Shivakumar told press on Sunday.

"A permanent solution must be found for the garbage problem," he asserted. Shivakumar, who also holds the Bengaluru portfolio, said that the government has already identified two sites to ensure better garbage disposal and that they are looking for two more sites.

"A permanent solution must be found for the garbage problem," he said.

"The City is growing, so we have decided to purchase land now and keep it ready," he said.

Shivakumar's comments come after a major political row over garbage disposal. He had accused the BJP of blocking garbage trucks going to the Bellahalli waste processing unit amid protests by residents. Shivakumar threatened to dump the garbage in front MLA's homes, triggering a sharp response from the BJP.

Shivakumar has also claimed that there was a "garbage mafia" operating in the City. —*ANI*

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Don't share Aadhaar, OTP: PM on digital fraud

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday urged citizens not to share their OTP, Aadhaar number or bank account details with anyone, warning against rising cases of digital fraud. In his monthly radio programme Mann Ki Baat, he advised people to change passwords regularly and complete KYC or re-KYC only through bank branches or official platforms. Modi said fraudsters often pose as officials to dupe victims, especially senior citizens. —*PTI*

Pak claims to hit 7 terrorist camps in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, 22 FEB

Pakistan announced it targeted at least seven terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan in retaliation for recent attacks in Pakistan. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting said Pakistan has evidence that these attacks, including one at a Shiite mosque in Islamabad, were carried out by Khwarij, linked to Afghan-based Pakistani Taliban and ISKP. Despite urging the Afghan Taliban to act, Pakistan claims Kabul failed to prevent terrorist use of its territory. Afghanistan warned that the strikes on Paktika and Nangarhar would be met with a "necessary and measured response." —*PTI*

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SC to hear Meta-WhatsApp case on Monday

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

The Supreme Court is set to hear appeals from Meta and WhatsApp on Monday regarding a Rs 213.14 crore penalty imposed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) over their privacy policy. A bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, along with Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, is expected to hear the case. The court is also hearing a cross-appeal by the CCI challenging a ruling that allows Meta and WhatsApp to share user data for advertising. The Bench had earlier said that the corporation was "playing with the right to privacy". —*PTI*

3 JeM militants killed in encounter in Kishtwar

JAMMU, 22 FEB

Three alleged Pakistani terrorists affiliated with proscribed Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) outfit were killed on Sunday in an encounter with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district, officials said.

The bodies of the slain terrorists were charred beyond recognition, the officials said, adding that preliminary assessments by security agencies suggest that one of the deceased is believed to be Saifullah, a notorious Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) commander.

Saifullah had reportedly infiltrated into Jammu and Kashmir nearly five years ago and had since remained active in the region, allegedly masterminding several deadly attacks on security forces, including the one in July 2024 that left four soldiers, including a captain, dead. He had escaped several encounters in the past.

Arms seized after the encounter in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar —*PTI*

Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Pratik Sharma complimented the troops of White Knight Corps for their "swift and precise" action to neutralise the two terrorists.

"The Army Commander commends the commanders and troops on ground for their persistence in challenging terrain and weather conditions. Northern Command remains committed to ensuring a terror-free Jammu and Kashmir," the army said in a post on X. —*PTI*

8 LET MEMBERS PLANNING ATTACK ARRESTED

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

In a major counter-terror operation spanning three states, the Delhi Police has dismantled a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) module comprising eight operatives, including seven Bangladeshi nationals who had illegally entered India and procured forged identity documents, an official said on Sunday.

The arrests followed coordinated raids in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, after investigators traced the group's involvement in putting up pro-Pakistan and pro-terror posters, featuring photographs of terrorist Burhan Wani, at multiple locations in Delhi. The module was being handled from Bangladesh by Shabir Ahmad Lone alias Raja alias Kashmiri, a trained LeT terrorist from Jammu and Kashmir who was previously arrested by the Delhi Police's Special Cell in 2007 in a case involving the recovery of arms and ammunition. —*PTI*

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TOP MAOIST OF BANNED PLGA SURRENDERS IN TELANGANA

HYDERABAD/RAIPUR, 22 FEB

Top commander of the banned People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), Thippiri Tirupathi alias Devuji, 62, surrendered on Sunday.

The surrender is seen as a deadly blow to the organisation, which now lacks leadership.

The People's Liberation Guerrilla Army was founded on 2 December 2000 and known as the People's Guerrilla Army (PGA) by the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) People's War, also known as the People's War Group. The PLGA was founded on the first death anniversary of their three Central Committee members, who were killed in an encounter in Koyyuru.

About 300 Naxals, including top four central committee (CC) members of the outlawed CPI (Maoist), including Misir Besra alias Bhaskar, Devji, Rammanna alias Ganpathi alias Laxman Rao and Raji Reddy, are the last among those whom the security forces were looking for. —*Agencies*

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PM flags off fastest metro in the country

PM Narendra Modi flags off the Meerut Metro and Namo Bharat train at Shatabdi Nagar Namo Bharat Station, Meerut Uttar Pradesh —*PTI*

ALL ABOUT MEERUT METRO

Meerut Metro now lets people travel from Delhi to Uttar Pradesh in less than an hour. Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the Delhi–Meerut Namo Bharat Corridor, India's first Regional Rapid Transit System. He also unveiled development works worth almost

Rs 12,930 cr.

—REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

Where: Meerut to (last station)

Total Distance: 82 km
- 5 km in Delhi
- 21 km in Uttar Pradesh

Time: Less than 1 hour

- **Maximum speed:** 180 kmph. To run at 120 kmph on average.
- It will help 150 universities and technical institutes located along the corridor.
- By contrast, the Bengaluru Metro has a maximum speed of around 70-80kmph and an average operational speed of around 30kmph. Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai also have similar operational speeds.

DOCUMENTARY HONOURS SECULAR VISIONARY K RAHMAN KHAN

A new Urdu documentary on Dr K Rahman Khan journals his unwavering commitment to education, social upliftment, and inclusive development.

Titled 'A Guiding Light for the Community', the documentary traces Dr Khan's contributions as a visionary leader who worked for empowerment and institutional growth. His tenure in public life reflects a combination of integrity, foresight, and humility. The film emphasizes how his leadership extended beyond politics, focusing instead on strengthening communities, promoting harmony, and nurturing young minds.

Eminent personalities reflect on his impact. Former vice president Hamid Ansari speaks of his intellectual clarity and balanced approach to public service. Veteran statesman Yashwant Sinha acknowledges his steadfast principles and dedication to democratic values. Former Rajya Sabha MP Adeeb highlights his administrative vision and community-oriented initiatives. Former chief minister M Veerappa Moily reflects on his inclusive outlook, while former minister Roshan Baig and Salar Publications Trustee Sadaqat Peeran recall his accessibility and personal warmth.

Adding a lyrical dimension to the film is a soulful ghazal rendered by Raghu Pati Jhai.

The documentary by Sabiha Zubair Khan stands as a historical record of a compassionate leader respected across political lines and ideologies.

Scan the QR code below to watch the documentary, streaming on Salar Urdu Digital Youtube from 15 February.

WORD IMPRESSED WITH INDIA'S AI SHOWING: PM MODI

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday highlighted strides made by India in the field of artificial intelligence, even as he slammed the Congress party for its "shirtless" protest at the recent global artificial intelligence summit in Delhi. He said the nation already knew the Congress was naked and alleged that Congress had "crossed all limits".

Addressing his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat', Modi said the AI summit showcased how animals were being treated with the help of AI. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

RAJAGOPALACHARI'S STATUE TO REPLACE LUTYENS' IN RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Sir Edwin Lutyens will replace a statue of C Rajagopalachari at the Rashtriya Bhavan *FB*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Sunday that the statue of British architect Edwin Lutyens in the Rashtrapati Bhavan will be replaced with a statue of C Rajagopalachari, the first governor-general of Independent India. During his monthly radio address, 'Mann Ki Baat', Modi noted that even after independence, statues of British administrators remained in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, while those of India's great leaders were not honoured with a place there. He said that this change would The statue will be unveiled on23 February during 'Rajaji Utsav' celebrations. —*PTI*

'TO BOOST ECONOMY'

Madhya Pradesh varsities to offer temple management courses

INDORE, 22 FEB

Temple management will be offered as a subject in Madhya Pradesh's universities to boost religious tourism and bolster the economy, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav announced on Sunday.

Speaking to reporters in Indore, Yadav said universities will offer courses that cover religious tourism as well as financial and administrative management of temples, including security.

"We are trying to understand how proper temple management can help energise the economy," he said.

The CM said Samrat Vikramaditya University in Ujjain has taken the lead by offering diploma and post-graduate courses on the subject, under which students will receive theoretical and practical training from scholars. Religious corridors are being developed at 13 pilgrimage sites in the state along the lines of Ujjain's Shri Mahakal Lok, he noted. —*PTI*

Ex-MLA injured in accident in Mandya

MANDYA, 22 FEB

Former Nagamangala JD(S) MLA Suresh Gowda was injured after the car he was travelling in overturned near Bonthekoppalu in Mandya taluk on Saturday night. According to Basaralu Police, the accident occurred while he was returning from a wedding function in Maddur taluk. The driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle, which flipped over and suffered partial damage. Gowda, who sustained a hand injury, was travelling with three others; all four were hurt. After receiving first aid at Mandya Government Hospital, Gowda and the driver were shifted to Manipal Hospital in Bengaluru for further treatment. Their condition is said to be stable. A case has been registered and an investigation is under way. *—Salar News*

5,000 jobs created in mega fair in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 22 FEB

The Inclusive Mega Job Fair by Youth4Jobs created over 5,000 employment opportunities. Youth4Jobs, in collaboration with Rotary Club of Bangalore and Maharani Lakshmi Ammanni College for Women, brought together 56 employers from IT, BPO, retail, hospitality, manufacturing, logistics and BFSI sectors.A total of 340 candidates participated, including 140 persons with disabilities and 200 others. On-the-spot offer letters were issued by Shell (NGS Enterprises), while others will confirm selections soon. Founded by Meera Shenoy, Youth4Jobs continues to promote equal opportunity workplaces across India. *—Salar News*

All roads will be fixed before monsoon: DKS

DKS says won't wait for MLAs to inaugurate projects

RAMANAGARA, 22 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has said that all the road repair works in the City will be done before the monsoon season arrives.

Speaking to the media in Ramanagara on Sunday, Shivakumar stated that he has instructed Rs 5,000 crore road works "must be completed by March or April. I have also said that all the work should be finished before the onset of the monsoon".

Shivakumar said road works worth Rs 2,671 crore have been taken up in the last three months.

Earlier, in a statement after holding a Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) meeting, he said that 80 per cent of the tender processes have already been completed for road work in the City.

Shivakumar emphasised that projects should not be delayed for ceremonial reasons.

Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar issued directions that road projects worth Rs 5,000 crore must be completed by March or April this year —PTI

"Do not wait for Ministers or MLAs to attend foundation ceremonies. Start the work immediately and complete the formalities later," he said.

Bengaluru's infrastructure had made national headlines as the roads collapsed in a short period of time and several industrial leaders openly criticised the government for mismanagement.

While both Shivakumar and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah issued several deadlines last year for all pothole repair work to be completed, they were not met. However, the government has stepped up measures to fix some roads.

Meanwhile, speaking to press in Bengaluru, Shivakumar defended party leader Rahul Gandhi. He said Gandhi was not being allowed to speak in the Lok Sabha.

"Rahul Gandhi is doing whatever is in the interest of the country. When there is a tariff problem, farmers in this country will be affected.... Unfortunately the Leader of the Opposition has not been allowed to discuss various subjects," Shivakumar said.

On his upcoming visit to New Delhi amid the power tussle, he said, "We have to go when called." *—Agencies*

MUTHALIK, KEREHALLI BANNED

2 Hindu activists held for Bagalkot clashes

BAGALKOT, 22 FEB

Two Hindu activists were arrested in connection with last week's stone-pelting incident and subsequent unrest during a procession of Shivaji Maharaj in Bagalkot city, police said.

According to officials on Sunday, the incident occurred in the Bagalkot's mutton market area, where stones and slippers were allegedly hurled during the Shivaji Jayanthi procession.

Bagalkot Town Police arrested Ashok Baraker, 22; and Sandeep Ferade, 38 and took them into custody. They have been charged with attempting to incite violence, obstructing public servants in the discharge of their duties, and causing damage to private property.

The arrests were made based on video and photographic evidence. Both accused have been remanded to judicial custody.

Bagalkot SP Siddharth Goyal told Salar News that with the arrest, a total of 10 people have been accused in the stone pelting incident. Earlier, eight people, from both Hindu and Muslim communities were detained.

Meanwhile, authorities have banned Pramod Muthalik, chief of Sri Ram Sena, and Hindu activist Puneeth Kerehalli from entering the district, it was as a precautionary measure to maintain public order and prevent any further disturbance.

Muthalik, who reached Bagalkot, condemned the restrictions. He said that those uniting the country are being targeted, while anti-nationals are being protected.

He said his outfit had organised an event on Monday which he would participate in at any cost. *—Salar News*

ADVENT OF SUMMER

Yellow bell trumpet flowers bloom in Bengaluru as summer creeps in; People walk past a clay pot stall on Sunday as temperatures range between 18-32 degree celsius. These humble vessels help keep the water cool on a hot summer day *-MOHAMMED ASAD*

Safaris resume at Bandipur, Nagarahole tiger reserves

MYSURU, 22 FEB

Safari operations resumed on Sunday at Bandipur Tiger Reserve and Nagarahole Tiger Reserve after a suspension of more than 100 days due to rising incidents of tiger attacks and concerns over man-animal conflict.

The first safari at Bandipur commenced at 2.30pm, shortly after forest authorities received official clearance from the state government to re-launch services. Officials reported a noticeable rise in tourist enquiries following the announcement earlier this week.

Under revised guidelines, safari hours have been curtailed. Bandipur's duration has been reduced from eight hours to five, while Nagarahole will operate for four hours. In the initial phase, only 50 per cent of safari vehicles will be deployed. The remaining vehicles and staff have been assigned to patrol forest fringes to prevent wild animals from straying into nearby villages.

Authorities also confirmed that all safari vehicles will be fitted with GPS tracking systems and dashboard cameras within two months to ensure strict adherence to permitted timings. In 2025 Nagarahole attracted 1.8 lakh visitors and generated Rs 1.5 crore in revenue. It incurred losses of nearly Rs 4.5 crore during the suspension period. *—Salar News*

JD(S) youth prez Nikhil to contest from Ramanagara

TUMKUR, 22 FEB

JD(S) Youth Wing State President Nikhil Kumaraswamy confirmed that he would contest the 2028 Assembly polls from the Ramanagara constituency.

"Ramanagara has given the (State) Chief Minister(s), and has given the (country a) Prime Minister," he told press in Tumakuru. "So there is no way that I am opting for another constituency."

Nikhil's father HD Kumaraswamy, mother Anitha, and grandfather HD Devegowda had previously represented the Ramanagara constituency. HDK went on to become the chief minister and is now serving as a Union Minister, while Devegowda served both as the chief minister and prime minister.

However, Congress' Iqbal Hussain won the JD(S) stronghold by over 13,000 votes in 2023.

At the time, Nikhil was also pursuing a career as an actor, staring in films such as 2021's 'Rider'. However, his stint in Sandalwood did not produce meaningful results and the his movies had dismal box office returns.

Reflecting on his 2023 loss, Nikhil said that it was a "last minute call" for him to stand in the election.

"I had to stand for my party, though somewhere around the corner, I knew the result," he said. Nikhil had also lost the seat in 2019. *—ANI*

If a Dalit becomes CM, it's due to Cong: Siddaramaiah

BENGALURU, 22 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that the Congress remains firmly committed to social justice, both in principle and practice, but the Opposition BJP and JD(S) weren't. He claimed that if a Dalit became the chief minister, it would be because of the Congress.

He noted his recent article marking Social Justice Day has sparked debate, and particularly referenced JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy. Siddaramaiah said that Kumaraswamy had accused him of using caste to save his chair.

Siddaramaiah dismissed the charge, asking "how many Vokkaliga leaders HD Devegowda has nurtured in the JD(S) party during his long political career."

"It is only the Congress party that has recognised and politically nurtured Vokkaliga leaders," Siddaramaiah noted, pointing to leaders such as Kengal Hanumanthaiah to SM Krishna.

"If Hanumanthaiah, Kadidal Manjappa, and Krishna became chief ministers, it was because of the Congress," Siddaramaiah asserted, accusing Devegowda and Kumaraswamy of being against their own caste to prioritise their family members.

He questioned whether the JD(S) or the BJP in the State is capable of fostering such aspirations.

> **Only Congress nurtured Vokkaliga leaders... I can confidently say that if anyone from the Dalit community one day becomes Chief Minister of the State, it will be possible only through the Congress party.**
> Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

HDK HITS BACK

Later, Kumaraswamy said that the "caste for the sake of the chair" remark was serious.

"You are not a champion of social justice but its destroyer," the Union Minister wrote on X, objecting to Siddaramaiah targeting Devegowda, who Kumaraswamy said. "Had he thought only about his family, you would not have become Finance Minister." *—PTI*

> **Your social justice has no conscience. If it had, (Dalit leader) Mallikarjun Kharge would have become Chief Minister before you... If the Congress alone makes Vokkaligas Chief Ministers, should you not immediately vacate the chair(for Vokkaliga DK Shivakumar)?**
> HD Kumaraswamy, JD(S) leader

One more woman killed by tusker in Chikkamagaluru

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 22 FEB

The menace of wild elephants continues to haunt the coffee-growing region of Chikkamagaluru, claiming yet another life within a span of four days. A woman labourer was trampled to death in an elephant attack on Sunday morning, triggering panic and sparking protests against the Forest Department.

The incident occurred at a plantation owned by Nagesh Gowda near Hunasehalli in the Koppa forest range of Chikkamagaluru district. The deceased Boramma, was a native of Kudligi in Vijayanagara district. She was reportedly working in the estate when the wild elephant suddenly killed her.

Tensions escalated when forest officials attempted to shift the body to a mortuary in a pickup. Residents opposed the move, placed the body on the state highway, and staged a protest. They alleged that the Forest Department had failed to take measures to prevent elephant attacks.

This is the second fatality in the same area within four days. Earlier, Yallappa from Hanagal taluk in Haveri district was killed in a similar attack at the same plantation. The deaths have created an atmosphere of fear among estate workers.

The Forest Department had deployed seven trained kumki elephants to capture the rogue animal. However, officials have temporarily suspended the operation. *— Salar News*

'Cong High Command must solve tussel over CM's post'

RAMANAGARA, 22 FEB

Congress MLA HA Iqbal Hussain on Sunday said that the party High Command should promptly resolve the power tussle for the Chief Minister's post in Karnataka.

"We need a change; we are asking for others to be given a chance. We are only asking for a change from an election perspective. Apart from that, there is no factionalism or vested interests. The High Command should quickly resolve the confusion regarding the leadership change. This is the demand of all the MLAs and Ministers, including me. Draw the curtain without giving room for confusion," he said.

Hussain further stated that there is information that Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has been asked to meet the party high command in Delhi on 26 February. Hussain is a public Shivakumar loyalist.

Shivakumar has also been stirring the pot, saying that when the time was right, the public would know about the leadership issue. *—ANI*

BOOST FOR CLASS 1-4 KIDS

Kerala govt app adds Kannada, Tamil to global edu software

T'PURAM, 22 FEB

Kerala's state-run KITE has added Tamil and Kannada content to GCompris, one of the world's leading educational entertainment software programs. This marks a significant contribution to the global Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) community.

KITE, the technology arm of Kerala's General Education Department, developed the localised content for its Kalipetti (Play Box) ICT textbooks, used by students in Classes 1 to 4 under the Kerala state syllabus, according to a statement.

KITE, the technology arm of Kerala's General Education Department developed the localised content for its Kalipetti ICT textbooks —FREEPIK

Previously, Indian language support in GCompris was largely limited to Sanskrit and Malayalam. "This initiative marks a significant expansion into other regional languages," said KITE CEO K Anvar Sadath.

Although Kerala provides textbooks in Tamil and Kannada for students in border areas and linguistic minority schools, the absence of such content in the global GCompris repository had prompted KITE to develop its own localised solutions within the KITE GNU/Linux operating suite.

KITE subsequently prepared 1,544 GUI translations and voice-overs in Tamil and 1,582 in Kannada.

The contribution has been formally approved by the KDE Community, one of the world's largest collectives of free software developers, and is now available across platforms, including the Google Play Store. KITE is also leveraging GCompris' new client-server model—which works effectively without an internet connection—to benefit children with special needs, the official added. GCompris includes 200 activities designed to help children up to ten years old develop various skills. *—PTI*

Fire breaks at electronics warehouse in Hubballi

HUBBALLI, 22 FEB

A fire broke out this afternoon at an electronics warehouse on Kusugal road due to a short circuit.

The fire at Trinity Marketing and Zedok Enterprises' warehouse caused losses running into crores of rupees.

Over five fire tenders were pressed into service to douse the blaze, which raged for more than four hours in the sprawling godown. Relief efforts are underway.

Earlier this month, a major fire broke out at a waste oil and junk godown in the Vasant Narasapura Phase-1 Industrial Area of Tumkur Taluk.

According to preliminary reports, the fire broke out at a warehouse storing industrial waste.

The godown is reported to be owned by a Delhi-based industrialist, RK Impression, and is linked to an industrial unit operating in the area. The blaze spread rapidly due to oil drums stored on the premises.

The thick smoke rose as the fire burned for over two hours, causing panic among industrial units nearby.

Firefighters from Tumkur Shira Nagar had difficulty bringing the flames under control due to highly flammable materials stored there. No casualty was reported. *—ANI*

—PTI

Sharad Pawar hospitalised due to dehydration

PUNE, 22 FEB

Sharad Pawar, president of NCP (SP), was admitted to a private hospital in Pune on Sunday after suffering mild dehydration, doctors said. The 85-year-old Rajya Sabha member is in a stable condition. He has been admitted to Ruby Hall Clinic and is being given intravenous fluids. Dr Purvez Grant, chief cardiologist and chairman of the hospital, said Pawar would remain under observation for two days and is expected to be discharged thereafter. He is being treated under the supervision of Dr Grant and consultant physician Dr Abhijit Lodha. Earlier this month, Pawar was hospitalised at the same facility for a chest infection before being discharged. —PTI

Manipur declares 3-day mourning for deceased MLA

IMPHAL, 22 FEB

The Manipur government has announced a three-day state mourning from Sunday following the death of BJP MLA Vungzagin Valte, who died at a private hospital in Gurugram on Saturday, aged 61. Valte, a Zomi tribal legislator representing Thanlon, had suffered critical injuries in a mob attack in Imphal's Nagamapal area during the outbreak of ethnic violence in May 2023. He had been undergoing prolonged treatment in Delhi and was recently airlifted back to the capital after his condition deteriorated. During the mourning period, the national flag will fly at half-mast on government buildings and official entertainment events will be suspended. Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren Singh and Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma paid tributes. —PTI

UP farmer chief's house arrest evokes protests

GHAZIABAD, 22 FEB

A farmer leader was allegedly placed under house arrest by police in Tronica City here ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to nearby Meerut, his supporters said. The alleged house arrest has sparked protests from local farmers even though police denied detaining the farmer leader who has been demanding greater compensation for land acquired in six villages. Tyagi's supporters said the farmer leader was detained at his residence around 8pm on Saturday. Photographs shared by him with the media purportedly show a sub-inspector and two other police personnel at his home. However, police denied that they have detained farmer leader Neeraj Tyagi. —PTI

—WIKIPEDIA

Ex-India footballer rejoins TMC ahead of WB elections

KOLKATA, 22 FEB

Former India footballer and politician Dipendu Biswas has rejoined the Trinamool Congress (TMC) ahead of the upcoming West Bengal Assembly polls. Biswas, a former MLA from Basirhat Dakshin, had earlier quit the TMC to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). However, he claimed that his brief association with the BJP was driven by "emotional factors" and that he has now returned to the TMC. The reunion took place at the TMC's Basirhat district office, with local leaders present. This development is significant as the Assembly polls in West Bengal are scheduled to take place soon. —PTI

Delhi Police busts LeT-linked terror module

Police seized posters, 10 mobiles, 25 credit & debit cards

Continued from Page 1>>>

Additional CP of the Special Cell Pramod Singh Kushwaha, addresses a press conference after 8 suspects were nabbed for allegedly plotting a major terror conspiracy, in New Delhi on Sunday —PTI

According to police, the investigation began on 8 February after a written complaint was filed at the Supreme Court Metro police station by a Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) shift in-charge regarding the pro-Pakistan and pro-terror posters pasted at the Janpath metro station.

Additional Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwah said that similar posters were later found at other locations in Delhi.

The posters featured photographs glorifying slain Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terrorist Wani and carried messages, such as "India stop genocide" and "Free Kashmir", along with Urdu slogans translating to "Hum Pakistani Hain, Pakistan Hamara Hai" and "Kashmiri Ek Jut-ta Divas".

An FIR was registered and further investigation launched by the Special Cell. The initial groundwork was carried out by a team of the Delhi Police's Metro unit and the probe was later transferred to the Special Cell.

Kushwah said the Special Cell, already tracking activities of LeT operatives with Bangladeshi connections in the wake of recent developments in Bangladesh, intensified human intelligence and technical surveillance.

Based on analysis, a team traced two suspects to Majherpara at Hatiara Gote in Kolkata.

On 15 February, a raid was conducted and two accused — Umar Faruk, 31, a resident of West Bengal's Malda, and Robiul Islam, 31, a native of Bangladesh — were arrested.

On February 21, simultaneous raids were carried out in Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu, leading to the arrests of six more operatives, identified as Mohammad Mizanur Rehman, 32, Mohammad Sefayat Hossain, 34, Mohammad Zahidul Islam, 40, Mohammad Liton, 40, Mohammad Uzzal, 27 and Umar, 32 — all natives of Bangladesh's Bogura district, the officer said.

During searches, police seized pro-Pakistan and pro-terror posters from the rented accommodations of the accused, along with 10 mobile phones containing incriminating material.

They also seized 25 credit and debit cards, five point-of-sale (POS) machines and Bangladeshi passports and identity cards. —PTI

5 DAYS IN POLICE CUSTODY

Cong's 'shirtless' protest assault on public order: Delhi Court

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Indian Youth Congress workers on 20 February staged a 'shirtless protest', holding T-shirts with slogans against the government and the India-US trade deal printed on them, at the AI Impact Summit, in New Delhi —PTI

The conduct of the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) workers arrested for protesting at the AI Impact Summit venue was not legitimate dissent, rather a "blatant assault on public order" that also hurt the country's "diplomatic image", a Delhi court said.

Judicial Magistrate Ravi made the observation on Saturday when the four IYC workers who were held for the "shirtless" protest at the Bharat Mandapam here were produced before his court. The court allowed five days of custody to the police to question them.

The magistrate said, "Such conduct palpably transcends the ambit of legitimate dissent, metamorphosing into a blatant assault on public order. It imperils not merely the event's sanctity but also the Republic's diplomatic image before foreign stakeholders, rendering it wholly unprotected by constitutional safeguards."

Summarising the reasons for allowing the Delhi Police's plea seeking custodial interrogation, the magistrate said that the accused hailed from remote parts of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Telangana, posing a high risk of their absconding.

This was "further heightened by early investigation findings suggesting external conspiracy links, the court said. The court allowed police custody remand of all four accused persons for five days with effect from today, i.e., till 25 February.

A portion of the order passed by judicial magistrate Ravi said that the protest imperilled or jeopardised not only the event's sanctity, but also the country's diplomatic image. —PTI

FIR filed against J'khand BJP leader and 100 others

GIRIDIH, 22 FEB

An FIR has been lodged in Jharkhand's Giridih district against the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the state Assembly, Babulal Marandi, and 100 other BJP workers for allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) imposed for the civic elections, police said on Sunday.

The case was filed by the Flying Surveillance Team (FST) on Saturday after Marandi was allegedly found holding a meeting with workers in a hotel in the Town police station area, hours after campaigning for the civic polls ended at 5pm.

Giridih Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ramniwas Yadav told PTI, "A complaint of MCC violation was lodged at the Town police station on Saturday."

An officer of the police station said the FIR was lodged against Marandi and 100 others following a complaint of MCC violation.

Reacting to the development, the former Jharkhand BJP chief told reporters that he had gone to the hotel's restaurant for dinner.

"You know, whenever a political leader goes somewhere for a meal people gather," Marandi said. —PTI

CITES PAWAR'S DEATH

M'rashtra Oppn to skip Fadnavis' high tea party

MUMBAI, 22 FEB

Senior Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Bhaskar Jadhav said the Opposition would boycott the customary tea party hosted by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday on the eve of the Maharashtra legislature's Budget Session.

Fadnavis had personally written to senior members inviting them to the event, which is a tradition on the eve of a session of the legislature, Jadhav added.

"The ruling party is arrogant and shows little respect towards the Opposition. Since there is no respect, no decency and no regard for the Constitution, we have decided to decline the high tea invitation," Jadhav told reporters.

He also slammed the trade deal between India and the United States, claiming it would adversely affect cotton growers and fisherfolk from the state.

However, the Fadnavis government has expressed no regret over the Union government's decision; therefore, it was decided to boycott the high tea invitation, the Shiv Sena (UBT) leader added.

Jadhav said another reason for the Opposition to decline the invite was due to the Maharashtra government's "ambiguous stand" on the death of Ajit Pawar in a plane accident.

Congress legislative party leader Vijay Wadettiwar charged that the government had done nothing about 22 farmers who had died by suicide in Yavatmal, while 76 had ended their lives in the Marathwada region. —PTI

First report on Ajit's crash likely before 28 Feb

The preliminary report on the plane crash in which NCP leader **Ajit Pawar** was killed will be out on or before 28 February, Union minister of state for civil aviation and Pune MP Murlidhar Mohol said on Sunday. Pawar and four others were killed on 28 January after their Learjet 45 crashed some distance away from Baramati airport. Talking to reporters at an event here, Mohol, however, said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation has already clarified in a press release everything related to the ongoing inquiry. —PTI

Ex-Assam Cong chief Bhupen Borah joins BJP

GUWAHATI, 22 FEB

Former Assam Congress chief **Bhupen Kumar Borah** on Sunday joined the ruling BJP in the presence of its state unit president Dilip Saikia here.

Hours after joining BJP, the ruling party inducted Borah into State Executive Committee. Borah became a BJP member at a function held at the Assam BJP headquarters 'Vajpayee Bhawan'.

Borah had resigned on 16 February, with the Congress high command not accepting it. He, after joining the saffron party, said: "I didn't resign from the Congress, thinking that I would join the BJP. I resigned, thinking that a self-introspection would take place about the wrongs in the Congress, and expected a promise that it would be corrected."

"The Congress also hurt the Assamese community's feelings. I served the Congress for 32 years with an ideology, conscience and patriotism; but I am hurt now," he said.

Welcoming him in BJP, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said there may be "some bitterness" inside Borah as he left the Congress after serving it for more than 32 years . —PTI

SC warns West Bengal DGP over political interference in SIR

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, 22 FEB

The Supreme Court has cautioned West Bengal's Director General of Police regarding violence and political interference during the SIR process, according to sources.

The sources said that the court made it clear that if the DGP does not act against the objectionable remarks made by political leaders, strong action will be taken against the DGP in future.

The court said that during the next hearing, the DGP must report what measures have been taken regarding the complaints received.

The case will be heard again next month.

HC FORMS PANEL

Calcutta High Court Chief Justice Sujoy Paul has constituted a committee to oversee interim arrangements for shifting urgent matters to alternative courts following the engagement of judicial officers for work related to the SIR exercise in West Bengal.

On 20 February, the Supreme Court issued an "extraordinary" direction to deploy serving and former district judges to assist the poll panel in the controversy-ridden SIR. —Agencies

TN polls: IUML seeks seats as BJP, AIADMK target DMK

CHENNAI/ NAMAKKAL 22 FEB

IUML President Kader Mohideen on Sunday sought five Assembly seats from the DMK for the 2026 Tamil Nadu elections after the first round of talks.

Calling the IUML a community-based party representing over 60 lakh Muslim voters, he also urged the DMK to allot 16 constituencies to Muslim organisations within its alliance.

Meanwhile, Senior BJP leader Tamilisai Soundararajan on Saturday accused the DMK-led government of fabricating a rights-deprivation narrative to hide failures and corruption.

She said Chief Minister MK Stalin's confrontational stance with the Union government was misleading.

Additionally, AIADMK Chief Edappadi K Palaniswami sought to reclaim the state's economic narrative, claiming Tamil Nadu's 11.19 per cent growth stems from projects signed under his previous regime, not the current DMK government. —PTI

POCSO case filed against Swami Avimukteshwaranand

LUCKNOW, 22 FEB

An FIR was lodged on Saturday in Prayagraj against **Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati** and his disciple Mukundanand Brahmachari over allegations of sexual abuse of two people, including a minor, in the past year.

According to officials, the FIR has been registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and relevant sections of the BNS.

The complaint alleges that the accused subjected the minor and another youth to repeated sexual assault on multiple occasions over the past year.

It further alleges that the acts were carried out by misusing religious authority.

Responding to the court order on Saturday, Avimukteshwaranand said the case against him was false and that those actually responsible for the alleged acts must be punished.

SP Chief Akhilesh Yadav criticised the FIR against Swami Avimukteshwaranand, calling it "political malice" following the seer's Magh Mela protests.

The SP leader claimed the government is targeting the Swami to damage his credibility and "vitiate the atmosphere" ahead of the elections. —Agencies

MANN KI BAAT

Use 'swadeshi' products during festivals, says Modi

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

PM Narendra Modi interacts with people during a metro ride to Meerut South station after the flagging off ceremony of the Meerut Metro and Namo Bharat train at Shatabdi Nagar Namo Bharat Station, in Meerut —PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday strongly pitched for use of 'swadeshi' products during festivals and asked people to always remember to be 'vocal for local'.

Modi said the Islamic holy month Ramzan is currently going on and wished everyone the best for the occasion.

Holi is also coming in a few days and this means that a time filled with colours, gulal, and laughter is about to knock at our doors, he added. He said many foreign-made products have entered the Holi celebrations, or even other festivals.

"Keep them away from festivals, keep them away from Holi as well, and adopt 'swadeshi'. When you buy swadeshi, you also help in the campaign to make the country self-reliant," he said

Centuries-old tradition came alive after 250 years

He talked about the centuries-old Mamangam tradition, often called the Kerala Kumbh, which has come alive again after nearly 250 years, saying from North to South, the rivers may be different but the stream of faith is the same.

- Modi talked about the centuries-old Mamangam tradition, often called the Kerala Kumbh, which has come alive again after nearly 250 years, saying from North to South, the rivers may be different but the stream of faith is the same.

He said many people also call it the 'Maha Magha' festival or 'Kerala Kumbh' where bathing in the holy river during the month of Magha and making that moment an indelible memory of life is its soul.

Over time, he said, this tradition seemed to have disappeared and for nearly 250 years, this event had not been celebrated with the same grandeur as it used to be.

Tribute to Jayalalithaa for women-centric work

He paid glowing tribute to late chief minister of Tamil Nadu J Jayalalithaa, whose birth anniversary falls two days later, saying she lives in the hearts of people for her efforts towards the welfare of women and maintenance of law and order.

Modi said just a mention of "Amma" -- as Jayalalithaa was often called -- brings a glow to the faces of the people of Tamil Nadu.

Jayalalithaa was one such popular leader, Modi said, adding that he still feels the deep affection the people of Tamil Nadu had for her when he visits the state. —PTI

— PTI

Soldier, 5 others held for heroin trade in Punjab

CHANDIGARH, 22 FEB

Punjab police arrested six suspects, including an army soldier, for heroin trafficking. The arrests followed a two-month interception by Faridkot Police, who uncovered a well-organised drug operation. The accused are involved in multiple cases, police said. They recovered 4.8kg of heroin, a weapon, and two vehicles, a Thar and an XUV. Punjab Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav confirmed the arrests and said an FIR has been lodged. Further investigations are underway to establish the network's full extent. The suspects' criminal records are being examined. —*PTI*

Gang refuses to pay Rs 600, wrecks Kozhikode hotel

KOZHIKODE, 22 FEB

A restaurant was allegedly vandalised by a three-member gang after refusing to pay Rs 600 for food at Aliyans Hotel, opposite MIMS Hospital. Police said one suspect has been detained, with searches ongoing for the other two. The incident happened around 9.30pm on Saturday. The gang claimed they couldn't pay because no local restaurants accepted their money. Following an altercation, they damaged the restaurant with an iron rod, including the display board and a glass almirah. An employee, Shahanad, was injured. The damage is estimated at Rs 1.2 lakh. A case has been registered, and investigations are going on. —*PTI*

17,000 tonnes of illegal coal seized in Meghalaya

SHILLONG, 22 FEB

Meghalaya police seized over 17,000 metric tonnes of illegally mined coal and 25.5kg of explosives during a raid in East Jaintia Hills, officials confirmed. The operation occurred on the night of 20-21 February, following the February 5 blast at an illegal mine that killed 34 people. The police recovered 17,322 tonnes of coal and the explosives from abandoned sites. No arrests were made during the raid. Since the incident, 94 FIRs have been registered, and 22 arrests have been made. Enforcement continues with the Meghalaya High Court monitoring proceedings, and a judicial inquiry has been set up to probe enforcement lapses. —*PTI*

Maoist leader Devji surrenders to Telangana police

He founded People's Liberation Guerrilla Army

HYDERABAD, 22 FEB

Thippiri Tirupati aka Devji —*SCREENGRAB*

Top Maoist commander and the organisation's key "strategist" Thippiri Tirupati alias Devji has surrendered, a top police official said on Sunday. Devji's surrender is seen as a big push to Union Home Minister Amit Shah's March deadline to end naxal terror.

Devji hails from Telangana's Jagtial district and his surrender can be seen as a deadly blow to the outlawed organisation, which now lacks leadership.

Devji, 62, is believed to have succeeded the late CPI (Maoist) General Secretary Nambala Keshav Rao alias Basavaraju, who died in May 2025.

Another senior Maoist leader Malla Raji Reddy along with several cadres of the CPI (Maoist) have also surrendered. Their surrender comes days before the Centre's March 2026 deadline to eliminate Naxalism from the country. "The surrender will be officially shown in a couple of days. They are now with the Telangana Police," the official said.

Devji, carrying a bounty of Rs 1 crore on his head, founded the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) and become a key Central Committee member of the CPI (Maoist) and a politburo member.

Devji, who was the in charge of the Central Military Commission (CMC), operated from Maad in Chhattisgarh.

In 1982, while studying Intermediate in Korutla in Jagtial district, he was attracted towards the Radical Student Union (RSU).

At that time, clashes occurred between RSU and the ABVP in Karimnagar district and Devji was named as an accused. In 1983, Devji joined CPI ML (PWG) and went underground.

During 1983-1984, he was a Dalam member in Gadchiroli Dalam and in 1985 he was elevated as an area committee member. He was then elevated as central committee member in 2001 and was in charge of CMC in 2016. —*PTI*

IDFC staff involved in Rs 590 cr fraud

MUMBAI, 22 FEB

The IDFC First Bank revealed on Sunday that a Rs 590-crore fraud had been committed by its employees and others in the accounts of the Haryana government kept with it.

In a regulatory filing made in the wee hours, the IDFC First Bank said it has disclosed the matter to the banking regulator and had also filed a police complaint.

At present, it estimated the fraud size at Rs 590 crore and added that a "reconciliation exercise" will determine the final amount based on further information, validation of claims, and recoveries of any nature.

Providing details of the fraud, it said a Haryana government department had been banking with IDFC First Bank, and the bank received a request for a closure and balance transfer to another bank on an undisclosed date.

"Discrepancies were found in the amount mentioned vis-a-vis the balance in the account," it said, adding that similar issues were observed in other accounts of Haryana government entities, who had engaged with the bank.

IDFC First Bank said that a review was conducted, and it was found that the issue is "confined to a specific group of accounts of the Haryana Government" operated through the said branch in Chandigarh" and stressed that it does not extend to other customers of the branch. Four officialsof the IDFC First Bank have been suspended.

As a recovery measure, IDFC First Bank has sent "recall request" to certain beneficiary banks. — *PTI*

Jammu student who died in Ukraine laid to rest

JAMMU, 22 FEB

Manjinder Singh, 24, travelled to Russia on a student visa to get higher education and support his family. He returned to his family, however, months later in a coffin. His family said he was lured into joining the Russian Army with false promises.

Singh had travelled to Russia in December 2024 to build a better life but his death in the Russia-Ukraine conflict has plunged his loved ones in Jammu into grief.

The family says that he came into contact with agents who lured him and other Indians with promises of high salaries — reportedly up to Rs 1 crore for a one-year contract — and assurances that the work would be non-combat in nature. In August Manjinder joined the Russian Army and underwent around 15 days of training. He said the last conversation between Manjinder and his family took place on 20 August. The following day, his phone was switched off. Months passed without contact, prompting the family to approach the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

After repeated emails and requests, the family was informed in early February that Manjinder had been deployed in Ukraine and had died on 28 January. —*PTI*

5 school teachers held for 'raping' minor

KENDRAPARA, 22 FEB

Five teachers of a private school have been arrested for allegedly raping a 13-year-old girl in Odisha's Kendrapara district, police said.

The arrests were made on Saturday after the father of the Class-7 student and the district child welfare committee lodged complaints at the Rajkanika police station, alleging that the accused teachers had raped the minor, a senior officer said.

The parents of the student approached the district child welfare committee after their daughter accused the teachers of abusing her sexually since a long time, he said.

The committee initially investigated the allegation and brought the matter to police, the officer said.

"A complaint was lodged on 18 February. After a 48-hour-long investigation, we referred the case to the police for action," child welfare committee member Swagatika Patra said.

The panel also directed the district education officer to carry out a separate investigation into the allegation, she said.

"The teachers were arrested after a preliminary investigation. A probe is underway," Rajkanika police station inspector-in-charge Sanjay Mallick said. Meanwhile, the BJD submitted a memorandum to the Kendrapara SP and demanded punishment for the culprits. — *PTI*

A Coast Guard ship deployed in the north Arabian Sea sighted a foreign boat inside the EEZ, approximately 115 nautical miles west of Dwarka and it was intercepted —*INDIAN COAST GUARD*

4 Iranians caught with 200 cartons of cigarettes off Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 22 FEB

The Coast Guard intercepted a foreign boat in the Arabian Sea off Gujarat and apprehended four Iranians and seized 200 cartons of foreign cigarettes valued at nearly Rs 5 crore, the ICG said on Sunday.

The operation was carried out on Saturday off the Dwarka coast where a vessel named 'Al Mukhtar' manned by four Iranians, was found concealing 200 cartons containing about one lakh packets of foreign cigarettes.

The international market value of the consignment is estimated at Rs 2.5 crore to Rs 5 crore, the ICG said in a post on X.

The boat is being escorted to Porbandar in Gujarat for investigation and joint interrogation of the crew.

"On 21 February, @IndiaCoastGuard ship intercepted a suspicious foreign boat inside the #Indian #EEZ, approximately 115 NM west of #Dwarka. The vessel, identified as Al Mukhtar, was manned by four #Iranian crew. On rummaging, 200 cartons containing about one lakh packets of foreign brand cigarettes were discovered concealed in the holds," it said.

Earlier, the ICG and the Gujarat ATS conducted a joint operation on 16 February apprehended two Iranians with around 200 kg of narcotics off the Gujarat coast. — *PTI*

Woman lashes out at Kerala Health Minister over medical negligence

KOZHIKODE, 22 FEB

Harshina (R) with Minister Veena George during happier times —*ANI*

Harsheena, a 24-year-old from Manakkadavu near Pantheerankavu, has accused Kerala Health Minister Veena George of failing to deliver justice in a medical negligence case.

She underwent a caesarean section at Kozhikode Medical College in 2017. Following the surgery, she suffered persistent abdominal pain. In 2022, a scan at a private hospital revealed an artery forceps had been left inside her, which was subsequently removed through surgery.

Speaking to the media, Harsheena said the minister's claims that her case had been resolved were incorrect. "The Health Department did not acknowledge the doctors' lapses despite all medical reports. We had to stage protests to get compensation," she said.

After forming an action council, her family lodged a police complaint in March 2023, describing it as medical negligence that endangered her life. The minister later intervened, promising compensation and action against the staff involved. However, months passed without meaningful progress, forcing Harsheena to announce a protest. The government then granted her Rs 2 lakh.

Harsheena alleged no action has been taken against the doctors, and that prosecution sanction was delayed. "Whatever action has been taken is due to our protests, not the Health Minister," she said. She vowed to continue protests until those responsible are punished. Harsheena's case has gained attention following a similar incident at Alappuzha Medical College, where forceps was found in the abdomen of a patient.

"The Health Minister is a complete failure. If justice had been done, I would not be protesting now," she said. — PTI

— *AI*

Man dies during police recruitment

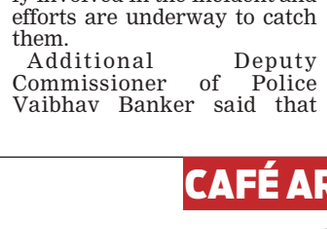
MUMBAI, 22 FEB

A 24-year-old man aspiring for a police job died after collapsing during a recruitment drive organised by the Government Railway Police in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, an official said.The incident occurred on Saturday during a 1,600m running event at the Police Parade Ground in the central Maharashtra city.

The deceased has been identified as Sangram Shinde, a resident of Palus in Sangli district, the police official said. Shinde collapsed just before the finish line and was rushed to hospital where he died. — *PTI*

Shots heard outside Varanasi BHU hostel

VARANASI, 22 FEB



Gunshots were allegedly heard outside a hostel at Banaras Hindu University on Sunday, officials said. No one was injured in the incident.

Roshan Mishra, a third-year BA student, alleged that he was standing outside the hostel when three youths arrived on a motorcycle and suddenly opened fire in the air before fleeing.

Police have registered a case against three persons allegedly involved in the incident and efforts are underway to catch them.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Vaibhav Banker said that ACP Bhelupur received information regarding the firing at around 9.30pm.

A police force from several stations, along with the outpost in-charge, rushed to the spot immediately. Police inspected the crime scene and accepted a formal complaint from the students.

Based on the complaint, an FIR has been lodged against the accused. Students recovered empty shell casings and handed them over to the police. — *PTI*

New labour codes contain radical reforms: Official

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

A top law commission official described on Sunday that the four labour codes offers the potential to create a more "inclusive and future-ready labour market" in the country.

The official said the codes stand among the "most consequential and far-reaching labour reforms undertaken in decades."

For years, India's labour regulation evolved incrementally, resulting in multiple laws with different definitions, varying thresholds and divergent compliance obligations.

"The four-code framework seeks to address this complexity by bringing together concepts around wages, safety standards and social security, while aligning regulation with a labour market that is no longer confined to traditional employment relationships," Law Commission member secretary Anju Rathi Rana said.

- The official said the new codes contain the "most consequential and far-reaching labour reforms ever undertaken in several decades in the country

Opposition parties, along with 10 central trade unions, have opposed the four new labour codes, calling them "anti-worker" and "pro-corporate." They have alleged that the codes facilitate "hire-and-fire" policies, restrict union rights, and reduce social security.

Rana said the four codes – the Code on Wages, the Industrial Relations Code, the Code on Social Security, and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH-WC) Code – mark a structural shift in the country's labour law. — *PTI*

CAFÉ ARPAN NEUTRALISES STIGMA

Neurodivergent staff charm Mumbai café customers

MUMBAI, 22 FEB

The board in front of Cafe Arpan indicates that it is run by differently abled people —*PTI*

From brewing espresso to managing inventory and handling daily operations, neurodivergent adults are redefining hospitality at a Mumbai cafe, where inclusion has become a thriving business model.

Cafe Arpan uses specialised training modules and visual aids to help staff navigate complex kitchen tasks, said a representative of the establishment, which emphasises the 'dignity of labour'.

By placing neurodivergent individuals in front-facing roles, the cafe seeks to dismantle stigmas and showcase the tangible economic contributions of a group sidelined in the job market.

The eatery, which started operating in 2018, recently relocated its operations from Juhu to Vile Parle (East).

Neuro-divergent is an umbrella term covering developmental and cognitive variations like autism, dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Many of the staffers have now gained independence, said Sushama Nagarkar, founder of the Yash Charitable Trust, which runs the cafe.

Nagarkar, who drew inspiration from inclusive workspaces in the US and Europe, said that neurodivergent individuals, who have long been relegated to exclusionary roles, need a place to keep themselves busy. "They had to be made to realise that the world is wonderful when you are not afraid of it," she said.

The cafe staff has been trained as per their specific needs, strengths and how to capitalise on them. The trust took the help of consultants to design the space so that neurodivergent staff can navigate easily, Nagarkar said.

For patrons, the experience is a lesson in empathy. "The service here is as professional as any high-end cafe, but there is a warmth here that you don't find elsewhere," a customer said. — *PTI*

Gurugram teen assaulted by live-in partner stable

GURUGRAM, 22 FEB

A 19-year-old female student who has alleged that she was brutally assaulted in Gurugram by her live-in partner, and is undergoing treatment at Safdarjung Hospital in New Delhi, is in a "stable condition", Gurugram Police said on Sunday.

The student has alleged that her live-in partner poured sanitiser on her private parts and set them on fire. The arrested accused has been identified as a 19-year-old from Narela. Gurugram Police have imposed serious charges, including rape, against him. He is currently in police custody. The FIR, registered under the Badshahpur police station area in Gurugram, states that

- The student has alleged that her live-in partner poured sanitiser on her private parts and set them on fire. The accused has been identified as a 19-year-old from Narela

he was having a physical relationship with her under the pretext of marriage, thrashing her and subjecting her to violence.

Police said the accused was arrested, produced before a court after remand and sent to jail. Doctors' opinions are awaited for adding further sections to the case. Investigations are continuing. — *ANI*

After 4 yrs of Russia-Ukraine war, peace is still elusive

When Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine surpassed 1,418 days last month, it officially exceeded a historic milestone — the same span of time it took Moscow to defeat Nazi Germany in World War II.

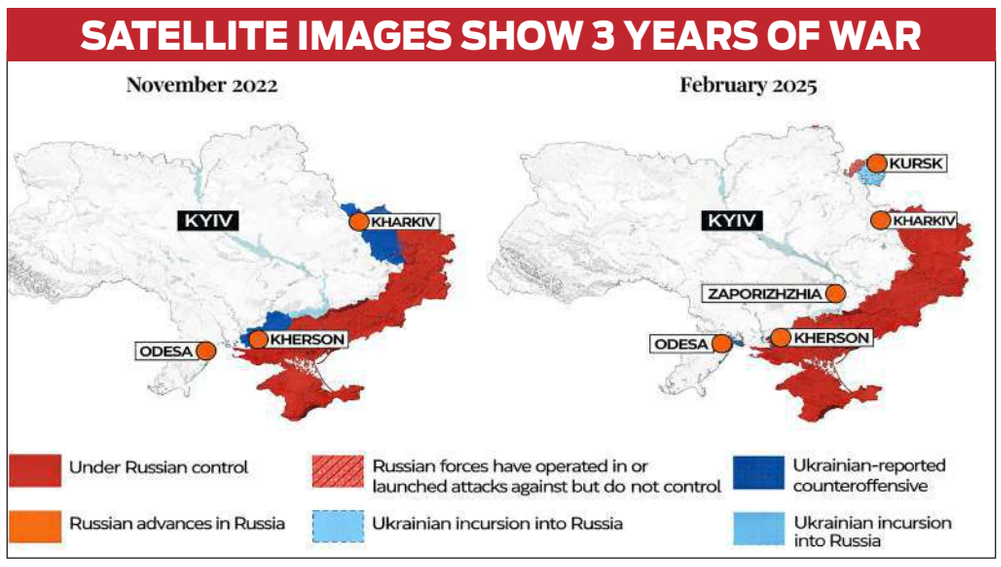
And unlike the Red Army that pushed all the way to Berlin eight decades ago in what it called the Great Patriotic War, Russia's 4-year-old, all-out invasion of its neighbour is still struggling to fully capture Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland.

After Moscow failed to seize the capital of Kyiv and install a puppet government in February 2022, the conflict turned into trench warfare with tremendous cost. By some estimates, nearly 2 million soldiers are dead, wounded or missing on both sides in Europe's most devastating conflict since World War II.

Russia has occupied about 20 per cent of Ukrainian territory since illegally annexing Crimea in 2014, but its gains after the 24 February, 2022, invasion have been slow. NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte this month likened Moscow's advance to "the speed of a garden snail."

Russian troops have moved only about 50km into the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine in the past two years in a grinding battle for control of a few strongholds.

Despite the slow pace and high cost, President Vladimir Putin has maintained his maximalist demands in US-mediated peace talks, saying Kyiv must pull its forces from the four Ukrainian regions that Moscow illegally annexed but never fully captured.



A WAR OF ATTRITION

Initially involving quick movements of large numbers of troops and tanks in Russia's opening blitz and Ukraine's counteroffensive in fall 2022, the fighting morphed into bloody positional warfare along the 1,200km front line.

The Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies estimated Russian military casualties at 1.2 million, including 3,25,000 killed. It put Ukrainian troop casualties at up to 6,00,000, including up to

For the first time in military history, drones are playing a decisive role, making it effectively impossible for either side to covertly mass significant numbers of troops.

Since early in the conflict, Ukraine has relied on drones to offset Moscow's edge in firepower and stem its advances, but Russia has drastically expanded drone operations and introduced longer-range optical fibre-tethered drones to avoid electronic jamming. They widened the kill zone to 50km from the front, leaving the terrain tangled in strands of filament.

The mixture of high-tech drones and World War I-style trench fighting has seen small groups of infantry — often just two or three soldiers — try to infiltrate enemy positions into towns flattened by Russian heavy artillery and glide bombs.

LONG-RANGE ATTACKS

Ukrainian officials described this winter as the most challenging of the war. Russia exponentially increased its strikes on the country's energy system, causing blackouts in Kyiv, where power supplies to many were cut to a few hours a day amid bitter cold.

Russia has also increasingly targeted power lines, aiming to halt energy transfers and split Ukraine's power grid into isolated islands, increasing pressure on the grid.

Ukraine retaliated with long-range drones and missiles sank several Russian warships in the Black Sea, forcing Moscow to redeploy its fleet from Russia-occupied Crimea to Novorossiysk. And in an audacious attack code-named "Spiderweb," Ukraine used drones from trucks to hit several air bases hosting long-range bombers across Russia in June, a humiliating blow to the Kremlin.

US PRESSURE, CONFLICTING DEMANDS

US President Donald Trump, who once promised to end the war in a day, has pushed to end the fighting, but mediation efforts have run into sharply conflicting demands.

Putin wants Ukraine to pull its troops from the part of the Donetsk region it still controls, abandon its bid to join NATO, curb its military and grant official status to the Russian language, among other demands Ukraine has rejected. Russia left the door open to Kyiv's prospective European Union membership, but it firmly ruled out any European peacekeepers deployed to Ukraine as part of a settlement.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wants a ceasefire along the existing line of contact, but Putin rules out a truce, demanding a complete withdrawal from the four regions.

Ukraine and its allies accuse Putin of dragging out talks while he seizes more territory.

While sticking to their positions, Putin and Zelenskyy have praised US mediation and tried to curry favour with Trump.

After a disastrous White House meeting a year ago, Zelenskyy has adopted a more practical negotiating stance, emphasising Ukraine's goodwill. After Trump called for a presidential election in Ukraine, Zelenskyy signalled readiness for it even though it's banned under martial law.

ELUSIVE SETTLEMENT

Zelenskyy said the White House has set a June deadline for the war's end and will likely pressure both sides to meet it. But even as Trump appears eager for a peace deal before the US midterm elections, challenges remain.

With Putin insisting on Ukraine's pullback from Donetsk and Zelenskyy ruling it out, a quick deal appears unlikely. Zelenskyy also expressed scepticism about a compromise US proposal to turn the eastern region into a free economic zone.

The war and Western sanctions have increasingly strained Russia's economy. Growth has slowed to a near halt due to persistent inflation and labour shortages. The latest US sanctions on Russian oil exports have added to the strain. —*PTI*

Damaged areas in Ukraine being patrolled by military officers -*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Epstein Files: After Andrew, will US make arrests next?

Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor seen laying down on unidentified women, while Ghislaine Maxwell and another woman stands behind them -*US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE*

The stunning arrest of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor by UK police on suspicion of misconduct in public office must have chilled many powerful American men to the bone. They may now wonder: could something like this now happen in the US?

The former prince's arrest is related to his association with dead sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and allegations he shared confidential material. Andrew has consistently denied wrongdoing and has been released under investigation.

To see UK police making arrests over allegations relating to Epstein contrasts strongly with the US where, so far, little has happened to further investigate those linked to the disgraced financier.

So, will we now see stronger Epstein-related investigative efforts and possibly even arrests in the US? And why haven't we seen anything like that, so far?

WILL THIS ACTUALLY PROMPT STRONGER ACTION IN US NOW?

It's possible. The whole situation is fairly unpredictable, and there has been mounting pressure on people named in the Epstein files to resign or step aside, particularly in higher education.

In Congress, US lawmakers are pushing hard for accountability. It's important to remember the collapse of the rule of law in the US is far from inevitable.

The Epstein story still has a long way to play out yet, if only because of the weight of the documentary evidence that needs to be sorted through.

It's also possible the arrest and potential prosecution of Mountbatten-Windsor (and others outside the UK) may end up revealing more from the Epstein story than has come out of the Department of Justice (DOJ) releases, which have been selective.

If the Mountbatten-Windsor case goes to trial – which is still far from certain – and as the scandal reverberates across Europe, that may end up circumventing efforts we have seen so far from the DOJ to slow-walk the release of Epstein-related documents and information.

WHY HAVEN'T BIG ARRESTS LIKE THIS HAPPENED IN US?

The most obvious reason is the stranglehold the Trump administration has on the DOJ. The performance of the attorney-general, Pam Bondi, in the recent judiciary committee hearing is a fair indication of that.

To have the attorney-general – instead of being accountable and answering legitimate questions about the Epstein files – waxing lyrical about US President Donald Trump being the greatest president in American history tells you a lot about the political capture of that department.

Another extremely unsubtle sign of that capture is the large banner featuring Trump's face that has just been slung across the Justice Department building. All this tells you the DOJ is not an independent government department anymore. It has been captured and weaponised by the Trump administration.

It's the same story at the FBI; instead of taking strong action over revelations appearing in the Epstein files, the agency appears to be focused on investigating Trump's claims about 2020 election "fraud" in Georgia.

That shouldn't exactly be a surprise, given FBI Director Kash Patel wrote a series of children's books depicting Trump as an unjustly wronged "king".

The unfortunate truth is there's no satisfactory answer as to why no significant arrests have been made in the US in relation to the Epstein files.

These are enormous networks that span political divides, including some of the richest people in the world. And, of course, they're very good at protecting themselves.

It's also a marker of Trump's capture of his political base.

You'd think a movement that coalesced around conspiracy theories, there was a powerful cabal of paedophiles at work in the US would be loudly calling for arrests after the Epstein revelations.

The fact they're not shows how ingrained their loyalty is, and the depth of the personality cult that has developed around Trump.

This base is far from a majority of the American people, but it has, for now at least, largely captured the major levers of power in the US.

It's common for people to say he does things like that to distract from the Epstein story. But I see his efforts in Iran as part of a concerted effort to radically reshape American society and the US's role in the world. It's about the reassertion of American power, which Trump understands to mean his own power.

The President unilaterally declaring a war on Iran without the ascent of Congress would defy the law. This is all part of a broader pattern of the Trump administration's attacks on rule of law.

Overall, Mountbatten-Windsor's arrest throws into stark relief the state of the US compared to other democracies like the UK.

What's happened in the UK shows the collapse of the rule of law is not inevitable. —*PTI*

Climate change adds to distress of 'tiger widows' in Sunderbans

Even in knee-deep murky waters, Rina Sarkar is nimble on her feet as she navigates the slippery mudbanks of Chargheri village on Satjalia island in the Sunderbans. She is one of the 150 local women who have come to the embankment, walking through a dense forest, to plant 2,000 mangrove saplings as part of a green initiative.

Rina, like several of her companions, is a "tiger widow" -- a local woman whose husband has been taken by the Bengal tiger.

"In 2022, my husband Sudipto Sarkar went to catch fish and crabs, and never returned. He was killed by a tiger," Rina says as her voice trails off.

According to locals, there are thousands of tiger widows in the expansive Sunderbans region -- their lives riddled with social ostracisation, financial instability, and psychological distress.

The situation has been exacerbated in recent years, amid rising instances of human-tiger conflict, primarily due to the adverse effects of climate change.

While there are legal provisions to provide compensation for wildlife-related fatalities, and several non-government organisations (NGOs) and community-based initiatives to help tiger widows, these women continue to face challenges.

Debaroti Das, who works with Purbasha Eco Helpline Society (PEHS), a Sunderbans-based NGO, says, "Human beings have three basic needs for survival: food, clothes, and shelter. In the Sunderbans, however, there are not many sources of income; here, attaining a quality life is near impossible. Even if people somehow manage to build a house, frequent cyclones that hit the region destroy them."

A BAD OMEN

The husband of Anima Mondal, a resident of the Chargheri village, was killed by a tiger around 20 years ago when he went to catch crabs -- one of the few sources of income in the region, selling for up to Rs 800 per kg.

The attack did not just leave Anima without a husband, the family's main breadwinner, but also turned her into an outcast. She was believed to be a bad omen and labelled as "swami-khejo", an insult innate to the region, signifying "husband-eater".

Das says, "The ostracisation of tiger widows leads to isolation, without financial or social support. I recently

PEHS Founder Umashankar Mandal with the NGO's workers during a mangrove sapling plantation drive in the Sundarbans, at Chargheri village on Satjelia island, in South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal -*PTI*

found that sons of these women are not even allowed to see the face of their mothers before they leave home for work in the morning, as it is believed that it would bring bad luck."

To make matters worse, many tiger widows are denied financial compensation for wildlife-related fatalities under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

Umashankar Mandal, founder of PEHS, says, "Since many men enter the forests without official permits, their deaths are often considered illegal, disqualifying their families from receiving government compensation."

This leaves numerous tiger widows vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Several studies have revealed cases of physical abuse, sexual exploitation, and trafficking into sex work.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADDS TO PLIGHT

In recent years, the Sundarbans -- the world's largest mangrove forest, where around 4.5 million people live -- has been a hotbed of climate change, facing an existential threat from rising sea levels, frequent and intense cyclones, and increasing salinity in water. These have also led to an increase in the frequency of human-tiger conflicts, according to experts.

For instance, in 2015-2016, the region -- stretching across 10,000 sq km across the Indo-Bangladesh border -- had shrunk by 210 sq km since the 1960s due to rise in sea level. Also, a gradual reduction in sediment flow from rivers to the Sundarbans region has resulted in loss of land mass.

Das says, "Habitat for both humans and tigers is getting submerged due to rising sea level. When the islands where tigers live submerge, the animal moves to human-inhabited areas, resulting in more number of attacks."

Climate has led to an increase in water salinity, threatening the health of mangrove forests and the quality of soil and crop. This has also caused disruptions to fish populations in the region, affecting livelihood of residents who depend on them for income.

Every year, around 40 people are targeted by tigers in the region, according to an article published in the Asian Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies in March 2025.

This number is expected rise, as no suitable tiger habitat will be left in the Sundarbans by 2070 because of climate change and rise in sea level, according to a 2019 study published in the Science of The Total Environment journal.

CONSERVATION EFFORTS

To curb the adverse impacts of climate change, Mandal and his organisation, PEHS, have been planting mangrove saplings in the Sundarbans since 2009.

Mandal says, "Cyclone Aila in 2009 caused large-scale destruction in my village, Chargheri. It was then that I realised the significance of mangroves, and decided to start planting and nurturing them."

Mangrove forests act as a natural shield against cyclones, tidal surges, and coastal erosion. They can also be a rich carbon sink, a storehouse of carbon -- the primary driver of climate change.

According to Mandal, his organisation has so far planted more than 1,120,000 mangrove saplings in six islands of the Sunderbans, with the help of 500 residents, who also maintain these trees.

PEHS also works to support tiger widows and other community members by running a primary school and promoting sustainable income sources, such as beekeeping.

However, residents of the Sunderbans would need much more support to improve their quality of life. —*PTI*

— PTI

MBS complains to UAE over Sudan, Yemen ties

RIYADH, 22 FEB

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman sent a complaint letter to the UAE, over Abu Dhabi's role in Sudan and Yemen, reported MEE citing US and western officials. The letter, sent weeks ago to UAE National Security Adviser Tahnoon bin Zayed and shared with the US, outlined objections and proposed mediation via Defence Minister Khalid bin Salman. The message expressed Saudi's intolerance of Sudan's civil war, with the UAE backing the RSF, while Riyadh supports Sudan's armed forces. It also addressed Yemen, defending Saudi involvement and criticising UAE support for the STC, which Riyadh finds unacceptable. The letter informed the US of their concerns amid diverging approaches in Yemen. *—PTI*

Danish army clear US submarine off Greenland

COPENHAGEN, 22 FEB

Denmark's military reported that its Arctic command evacuated a US submarine crew member for urgent medical care on Saturday. Located about 7 nautical miles (13 km) off Nuuk, Greenland's capital. The crew members were transferred to hospital after being retrieved by a Danish Seahawk helicopter deployed on an inspection vessel. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen defended Denmark's healthcare system, expressing she is "happy to live in a country where there is free and equal health for all," adding, "Where it's not insurances and wealth that determine whether you get proper treatment." The incident underscores NATO's alliance amid strains over Arctic interests. Neither Denmark nor the US have issued comments. *—PTI*

UAE sends food aid to support Kenya amid drought

ABU DHABI, 22 FEB

The UAE has dispatched 30 tonnes of food aid to Kenya through the UAE Aid Agency, supporting families impacted by severe drought and climate challenges. Kenya faces intensified impacts from La Nina, which disrupts weather patterns and threatens food security. Tareq Ahmed Al Ameri, chairman of the UAE Aid Agency, reaffirmed the country's ongoing humanitarian commitment, especially during Ramadan. He stated, "The UAE remains dedicated to standing alongside nations facing challenges in accessing essential food supplies." The aid aims to address water shortages, wildlife degradation, and food insecurity exacerbated by climate change. *—PTI*

Zimbabwe launches HIV prevention drug

HARARE, 22 FEB

Young women, mothers, and men gathered in Zimbabwe's outskirts of Harare to receive injections of 'lenacapavir', a new HIV prevention drug launched on Thursday. The drug, requiring just two doses annually, is seen as a breakthrough for high-risk groups such as sex workers. Constance Mukoloka, aged 27, said, "I am safe, I can work with confidence now," explaining daily pills were often difficult due to stigma as well as timing issues. Supported by PEPFAR and the Global Fund, the drug aims to reduce new infections, especially among adolescent girls and young women. Zimbabwe plans to reach 46,000 early beneficiaries. However, high costs paired with funding constraints threaten wider distribution. The drug offers a new hope for improved HIV prevention care across Africa. *—PTI*

At least 16 killed as Pakistan bombs Afghanistan

Islamabad says it struck terror camps, Kabul threatens retaliation

Local residents and civil defense workers look on as a bulldozer clears the rubble of a house hit by a cross-border Pakistani army strike in the Behsud district of Nangarhar province, Afghanistan *—PTI*

ISLAMABAD, 22 FEB

Pakistan on Sunday said it targeted at least seven terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan in retaliation for their recent rebel attacks, most notably the Shiite mosque bombing in Islamabad. Neither government released an official death toll, but an international rights group said that at least 16 people were killed.

Kabul said it would take a "necessary and measured response" to the strikes.

Pakistan has conclusive evidence that several acts of terrorism, including the Shiite mosque in Islamabad, one each in Bajaur and Bannu, followed by another incident in Bannu on Saturday, were allegedly perpetrated by Khwarij on the behest of their Afghanistan-based leadership and handlers, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting said in a statement.

In the latest terrorist incident, an army lieutenant colonel and a soldier were killed in a suicide attack in the Bannu area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Saturday.

"Responsibilities for these attacks were also claimed by Afghanistan-based Pakistani Taliban belonging to Fitna-al-Khwarij (FAK) and their affiliates, and Islamic State of Khorsan Province (ISKP)," the ministry said. Fitna-al-Khawarij is a term that the state uses for the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Pakistan said the Afghan Taliban had not curbed terrorist organisations operating from its soil, despite repeated efforts. Islamabad, therefore, took retaliatory measures, the Ministry said, and struck terror facilities.

Locals stand next to a damaged car at the site of a cross-border Pakistani army strike in the Nangarhar province, Afghanistan on Sunday *—PTI*

However, the International Human Rights Foundation (IHRF) said that the strikes struck a civilian home in Afghanistan's Behsud District, killing 16 members of a single family.

According to local sources cited by the IHRF, the victims, including men, women, and children, ranged in age from a one-year-old infant to an 80-year-old individual.

Two children miraculously survived the strike, while another 20-year-old man was injured.

The IHRF said there can be no justification for targeting civilian infrastructure.

Pakistani jets reportedly conducted multiple airstrikes across the Khogyani district of Nangarhar and hit a religious seminary in the Bermal district of Paktika province.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan in a statement warned that the Pakistani strikes on the provinces of Paktika and Nangarhar will be met with a "necessary and measured response".

"Our borders and the security of our people is our sacred religious and national duty," Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said, adding that "at the appropriate time, a necessary and measured response will be delivered to these aggressions".

The two were at war last year, resulting in hundreds of deaths as Pakistan intensified accusations at Afghanistan for not curbing terrorist sanctuaries. *—Agencies*

B'desh to resume tourist visas for India on 23 Feb

DHAKA, 22 FEB

Tourist visa services from Bangladeshi diplomatic missions located in India will resume on Monday, a Bangladesh Foreign Ministry official stated on Sunday.

The Bangladesh government had suspended tourist visa services from its diplomatic missions in India due to security reasons. However, after the Bangladesh election, the situation has improved, and the visa service will be fully resumed from Monday.

"Including the Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi, and in various cities of India such as Guwahati, Agartala, Mumbai and Kolkata--wherever Bangladeshi diplomatic missions are located--apart from tourist visas, other visa services were mostly ongoing. However, tourist visas had generally been

stopped, though they were still issued in urgent cases," a Bangladesh Foreign Ministry official said.

"Although we did not formally announce it as stopped, we are not formally announcing it as resumed either; in fact, it was ongoing and will now be expanded widely from Monday," the official further added.

Ties between New Delhi and Dhaka deteriorated rapidly after deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled to India after she was ousted by a student uprising. India, meanwhile has flagged the alleged persecution of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh

Separately, the spokesman for Prime Minister Tarique Rahman-led Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Salahuddin Ahmed, said that the first session of the 13th Parliament is likely to convene on 12 March.

"The session will also present (Muhammad Yunus-led) interim government ordinances and condolence motions," Ahmed, who is also the Home Minister in Rahman's new Cabinet, posted on social media.

BNP formed the government, bagging a landmark two-thirds majority in the crucial national parliamentary elections held on 12 February, while the far-Right Jamaat-e-Islami emerged as the main Opposition. *—ANI*

Muslim nations slam US' remarks on Israel-Arab East

ISLAMABAD, 22 FEB

Pakistan on Sunday joined 13 countries in condemning comments made by Mike Huckabee, US Ambassador.

In a Friday interview with Tucker Carlson, Mike Huckabee suggested "it would be fine" if Israel claimed its biblical territory stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates—a region encompassing modern-day Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and parts of Saudi Arabia.

Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, UAE, Indonesia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the League of Arab States and Gulf Cooperation Council, condemned Huckabee's statement. They rejected the inflammatory remarks, which constitute a violation of international law and the UN Charter.

The Ministers also reaffirmed that "Israel has no sovereignty whatsoever over the Occupied Palestinian Territory or other Arab lands," including the West Bank. *—PTI*

Student protesters have taken to the streets of Iran, the first massive protests since the crackdown on the uprising *—SCRENGRAB*

US troops move across Middle East, Iran on edge

WASHINGTON, 22 FEB

The US has commenced the strategic movement of military personnel across the Middle East for undisclosed missions. This comes amid increasing tensions with Iran, with President Donald Trump toying with the idea of striking the Islamic Republic.

Hundreds of servicemen have been transferred from the Al Udeid base in Qatar, according to Pentagon officials. Similar logistical shifts have been identified across a network of American facilities in Bahrain, the headquarters of the Navy's 5th Fleet, as well as in Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, Saudi, Jordan, and UAE

Government officials are apprehensive that 40,000 US troops currently deployed within the region could serve as the target in the event of an all-out war.

Military experts suggested that such a confrontation would differ drastically from Iran's strike on Al Udeid in June 2025, where Tehran provided the US with an advance notice.

Iran has repeatedly threatened to strike all American bases and facilities in the region, if the US were to intervene militarily.

The US has deployed two massive aircraft carriers to the region and bolstered its presence with dozens of other military assets.

Meanwhile, students in Iran have begun protesting again – the first large scale protests since the Islamic Republic's crackdown on demonstrators killed several thousands.

Students from at least three universities have taken to the streets. The students chanted slogans against the Theocracy.

Notably, Trump first threatened to strike Iran over its protester crackdown. Trump abandoned that line, and instead said he would strike Iran over its nuclear enrichment programme. *—Agencies*

Curfew in Gaur, Nepal after communal clash ahead of elections *—ANI*

Curfew extended in Nepal's Gaur municipality

KATHMANDU, 22 FEB

A curfew imposed in Gaur municipality in Nepal following clashes between two communities was extended indefinitely on Sunday.

The District Administration Office said the prohibitory order will remain effective from 8.30am on Sunday till the next notice, within the eastern Mudbalwa Gate, western Lalbakaiya Dam, north of Bam Canal and south of Gaur Customs Office.

The clashes between the two communities were triggered by a dispute on Thursday, followed by escalation of tension through Saturday morning with at least eight injured.

The original curfew order was issued from 1am on Saturday to 6.30am Sunday after a clash erupted between two communities in Savgadha village of Gaur-6 in Rautahat district on Saturday morning.

The prohibitory order was relaxed from 6.30am to 8.30am for the convenience of locals.

Gaur has remained tense for three days, as members of two communities argued during a wedding procession, escalating into stone-pelting and the torching of a vehicle.

Under Section 6(a) of the Local Administration Act, the District Administration Office has prohibited movement of people, organising gatherings, assemblies, rallies, and demonstrations within the curfew zone. *—PTI*

Trump dispatches 'hospital boat' to Greenland

WASHINGTON, 22 FEB

The US government has dispatched a medical vessel to Greenland to assist with "local healthcare needs", President Donald Trump announced on Saturday. The mission is coordinated with Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry.

This humanitarian move follows Trump's December appointment of Governor Landry to act as a special envoy to the Arctic territory.

On Truth Social, Trump confirmed the maritime initiative is underway, posting: "Working with the fantastic Governor of Louisiana, Jeff Landry, we are going to send a great hospital boat to Greenland to take care of the many people who are sick."

Responding via the social media platform X, the Louisiana Governor expressed his gratitude, stating he is "proud to work" alongside the President.

Details on the health crisis and mission objectives remain unclear.

US President Donald Trump posted an AI image of a 'great hospital ship' representing what he would send to Greenland—*TRUTH SOCIAL*

The deployment follows a shift in diplomacy. Trump claimed to have established a "framework for a future deal" regarding Greenland during NATO talks last month. This follows a period of friction sparked by Trump's persistent interest in taking control of the Danish island. *—PTI*

Closed Trump's account after 6 Jan riots: JP Morgan

NEW YORK, 22 FEB

JPMorgan Chase confirmed that it closed the bank accounts of US President Donald Trump and several of his businesses following Capitol attacks on 6 January 2021. This is the first admission it closed the accounts.

The acknowledgement came in a court filing in Trump's lawsuit against the bank and CEO Jamie Dimon. Trump is seeking USD 5 billion, alleging his accounts were closed for political reasons. JPMorgan has said the suit lacks merit.

Trump accuses the bank of trade libel and says Dimon violated Florida's Unfair and Deceptive Trade Practices Act. His lawyers also allege JPMorgan put him and his companies on a reputational "blacklist" to block future banking access.

Trump sued JPMorgan in Florida, where he lives. The bank wants the case moved to New York, where the accounts were held and Trump ran much of his business. *—PTI*

SHE SOUGHT ASYLUM

US deports gay woman to nation that bans LGBT+

DAKAR, 22 FEB

A US immigration judge ruled that Farah, a gay woman, could not be deported back to Morocco because it would endanger her life. However, the Trump administration deported her.

Farah is one of dozens of asylum-seekers confirmed to be deported from the US despite having legal protection from US immigration judges.

Being gay in Morocco is illegal. However, it was the violence from her family and their threats to end her life that force her to flee.

Farah and her partner crossed six countries to reach the US border in early 2025 and sought asylum. Farah was detained for nearly a year in Arizona and Louisiana. Though denied asylum, she received a protection order in August. Her partner was denied both and deported.

Farah is one of dozens of asylum-seekers confirmed to be deported from the US despite having legal protection *–x*

Three days before a hearing on her release, Farah said she was handcuffed by ICE and put on a plane to Cameroon in South Africa, where homosexuality is illegal, and placed in a detention facility before being flown to Morocco.

Notably, Cameroon is one of seven African nations to receive deported in a deal with the US. Others include South Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda, Eswatini, Ghana and Equatorial Guinea. Some have received millions in return for accepting immigrants.

The US Department of Homeland Security said it was "applying the law as written," and asserted that third-country agreements "ensure due process under the US Constitution." In respose, the US State Department said it had "no comment on the details of our diplomatic communications with other governments." *—PTI*

Russian strikes energy grid, kills 1 in Kyiv region

KYIV, 22 FEB

Russia attacked Ukraine with missiles and drones, killing one person in the Kyiv region, Ukraine's Emergency Service said on Sunday.

Another eight people, including one child, were rescued from under the rubble of destroyed buildings.

The attack caused damage and fires in five districts in Kyiv's suburbs: Obukhiv, Brovary, Boryspil, Bucha and Fastiv. In the village of Putrivka, Fastiv, emergency responders worked to save those buried under debris.

Russia also struck energy infrastructure in Ukraine's southern Odesa region, resulting in significant fires, which were later extinguished, the emergency service said.

In the almost four years since Russia launched an all-out war, and despite a US-led peace efforts, Ukrainian civilians have endured constant aerial attacks. Russia has ramped up attacks targeting the country's energy grid, leaving Ukrainians without electricity and heating amid harsh winters. *—PTI*

'Indians as tech giant bosses are boon for nation'

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

The growing number of Indian-origin leaders at the helm of major global technology companies should not be viewed as a "net positive" for both India and the world, said **Jeetu Patel, president and chief product officer of Cisco.**

"I think of India as a net exporter of talent," he said. He argued that Indian professionals thriving globally often do so because of the cultural grounding they receive at home.His remarks come at a time when several Indian-origin executives occupy top roles in leading US technology firms, fuelling discussions on whether India's global talent footprint reflects opportunity or loss.Indians and Indian-origin leaders now occupy some of the most influential tech roles in the United States and beyond, illustrating the global impact of the country's talent pipeline. Patel acknowledged Beijing's strength in artificial intelligence and advanced infrastructure, but cautioned against simplistic comparisons.

"I think China... is a force in the sense that they've got the benefit of (a different system). It's a very different thing (than) running a democracy with 1.4 billion people and having a system that is completely a command and control system," he said.

At the same time, he pointed to India's structural advantages, including demographics, scale and global partnerships.

Global talent mobility and geopolitical competition need not to be called binary contests. —*PTI*

—*ANI*

Pernod Ricard rules out IPO of India business

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Pernod Ricard has ruled out an IPO of its India business as part of its deleveraging plans, even as it reported a 4 per cent rise in net sales in the country. Growth accelerated to 8 per cent excluding Imperial Blue, which has been disposed of. Chief executive Alexandre Ricard said momentum is expected to continue in the second half of FY26, despite a first quarter hit by sharp tax increases in Maharashtra.

Chief Financial Officer Helene de Tissot confirmed the group aims to reduce its net debt-to-EBITDA ratio below 3x by FY2029, without listing the India arm. In FY26, Pernod Ricard sales were 1.61 billion euros.—*PTI*

—*PTI*

SBI to hike green portfolio up to 10%

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

The State Bank of India (SBI) has set a goal of increasing green advances to 7.5-10 per cent by 2030, with 25 per cent of these advances to be funded through green lines of credit. Green advances portfolio was 1.56 per cent of the bank's total advances as on 31 March, 2025. SBI has launched CHAKRA, a Centre of Excellence to finance sunrise sectors such as renewable energy, electric mobility and green hydrogen, accelerating India's green transition. The bank has committed to achieving carbon neutrality in its operations by 2030 and Net Zero by 2055. Launched in 2018, the SBI Green Marathon, aligned with India's Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) vision, encouraging citizens to adopt environmentally responsible lifestyles. —*PTI*

RBI builds secured data centre to counter enemy strikes

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has inaugurated a high-security data centre in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, strategically positioned away from cross-border threat zones and high seismic-risk areas, to safeguard critical financial infrastructure and ensure continuity of core systems.

Spread over 18.55 acres at Info Valley-II, Khordha, the greenfield facility will house computing systems supporting currency management, payment and settlement operations, and regulatory data functions. Analysts note the location was chosen for both operational and strategic reasons: its distance from India's western and northern borders reduces exposure to potential missile or drone attacks, while lower seismic risk mitigates vulnerability to earthquakes.

Unlike major hubs such as Mumbai and Chennai, Odisha is not a landing point for subsea communication cables, providing insulation from concentrated cyber risks and network disruptions.

The move reflects a broader global trend of central banks operating their own secure facilities to maintain direct control over mission-critical infrastructure, ensure regulatory compliance, and strengthen systemic resilience.

The Odisha centre has achieved Tier IV certification, highlighting its fault tolerance, high redundancy, and reliability. It complements RBI's Primary Data Centre in Kharghar, Navi Mumbai, and aligns with its plans for a pilot cloud platform in Mumbai and Hyderabad, providing secure cloud services to financial firms.

Industry experts emphasise that financial data is now treated as critical national infrastructure. By retaining tight institutional control, RBI seeks to minimise external threats and ensure uninterrupted functioning of the country's financial backbone, even under extreme scenarios.

Other institutions, including SEBI and the State Bank of India, are following similar strategies. —*PTI*

India's Saudi oil imports rise; Russian flow significant

Saudi Arabia's crude shipment to reach 1.1M bpd in Feb

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

India's crude import strategy has entered a calibrated rebalancing phase, with Middle Eastern suppliers led by Saudi Arabia regaining market share even as Russian volumes remain significant, shipping data states.

During 1-18 February, India's total crude imports averaged 4.85 million barrels per day (bpd), down 8 per cent from January's 5.25 million bpd, as flows from Russia cooled following US sanctions on key Russian exporters and the European Union's 18th sanctions package coming into effect in January.

Ship tracking data showed Russian shipments to India declining from 1.28 million bpd in December 2025 to 1.22 million bpd in January and further to around 1.09 million bpd in early February, down about 10 per cent month-on-month.

During 1-18 February, India's total cride imports averaged 4.85 million barrels per dat as crude supply from Russia cooled after US sanctions —*ANI*

Import of Russian crude are seen stabilising rather than collapsing.

"However, we continue to see this as a short-term stabilisation rather than a return to the mid-2025 peak, and we expect Russia's share in India's crude slate to stabilise to a lower range in 2026 as commercial and policy frictions build," Sumit Ritolia, lead research analyst, refining and modeling, Kpler.

This assessment is based on reports of a pragmatic understanding between the United States and India that effectively allows 'baseload' Russian imports while discouraging any material expansion. Near-term volatility is expected to remain driven by sanctions risk, shipping constraints and logistics.

Shipments from Saudi Arabia are set to reach 1 million to 1.1 million bpd in February with month-to-date arrivals tracking even higher at around 1.4 million bpd before expected moderation into early March.

Ritolia said the expectation seems to be that India can maintain volumes needed to support refinery operations and domestic fuel supply, but should avoid materially increasing purchases beyond that baseline.

Venezuelan crude import will only be at a marginal or supplementary level. E —*PTI*

SENSEX RISES 0.22%

Mcap of 6 firms climbs Rs 63,000 crore; SBI, Larsen & Toubro gain

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

The combined market valuation of six of the top-10 valued firms climbed Rs 63,478.46 crore last week, led by Larsen & Toubro and State Bank of India.

The 30-share BSE Sensex rose 187.95 points, or 0.22 per cent, over the past week.

Larsen & Toubro, State Bank of India (SBI), HDFC Bank, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), Bajaj Finance, and Reliance Industries were the gainers, while Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, and Tata Consultancy Services saw their valuations erode.

The market valuation of Larsen & Toubro jumped by Rs 28,523.31 crore to Rs 6,02,552.24 crore. SBI added Rs 16,015.12 crore to Rs 11,22,581.56 crore.

The valuation of HDFC Bank climbed by Rs 9,617.56 crore to Rs 14,03,239.48 crore, and that of LIC edged higher by Rs

5,977.12 crore to Rs 5,52,203.92 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of Bajaj Finance advanced Rs 3,142.36 crore to Rs 6,40,387 crore, and that of Reliance Industries went up Rs 202.99 crore to Rs 19,21,678.78 crore.

However, the mcap of Bharti Airtel tumbled Rs 15,338.66 crore to Rs 11,27,705.37 crore.

ICICI Bank mcap eroded by Rs 14,632.10 crore to Rs 9,97,346.67 crore. Infosys' mcap declined by Rs 6,791.58 crore to Rs 5,48,496.14 crore and that of Tata Consultancy Services dipped Rs 1,989.95 crore to Rs 9,72,053.48 crore. —*PTI*

YES Bank to exit FY26 with 1% ROA: CFO

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Private sector lender YES Bank expects to close the ongoing financial year with a return on assets (ROA) of 1 per cent, the bank's chief financial officer Niranjan Banodkar said.

"The bank will exit the current fiscal year with an ROA of 1 per cent, and on an annual basis, the ROA will exceed 1 per cent in the next fiscal year," he told PTI.

For the December quarter, the bank reported a net profit of Rs 952 crore, registering a growth of 55 per cent on an annual basis and 45 per cent on a quarter-on-quarter basis.

The reported annualised ROA for the quarter further improved to 0.9 per cent against 0.6 per cent in the previous quarter as well as the corresponding quarter last year.

The annualised reported

ROA for nine months has improved to 0.8 per cent against 0.5 per cent for 9 months of the last financial year.

Last year, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC) of Japan acquired a 24.9 per cent stake in the bank for about Rs 16,000 crore.

A critical component of the bank's profitability improvement is the resolution of the legacy priority sector lending (PSL) shortfalls.

Since FY24, the bank has maintained a 100 per cent compliance across all PSL subcategories. —*PTI*

Adani's plant among Rs 44K cr Odisha projects

BHUBANESWAR, 22 FEB

The Odisha government has approved 10 industrial projects worth Rs 44,200 crore, including Adani Group's pumped storage hydropower plant and a key semiconductor chip unit.

The approvals were granted at a high-level clearance authority meeting chaired by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi.

These projects are expected to generate employment for 8,765 people across eight districts, including Khurda, Koraput, Kalahandi, Malkangiri, Dhenkanal, Puri, Nayagarh, and Deogarh.

The initiatives span critical sectors such as rare earth manufacturing, semiconductors, cement, automobile and auto-components, telecom infrastructure, and renewable energy.

Adani Hydro Energy Twelve Ltd will invest Rs 9,731 crore in Nayagarh.

Majhi outlined a three-pronged approach to attract investments and reduce project turnaround times.

Meanwhile, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Limited, through its subsidiary Adani Gangavaram Port Ltd, has signed a memorandum of understanding with NMDC Ltd and Vale SA to develop an integrated iron ore blending facility and dedicated special economic zone (SEZ) at Gangavaram Port in Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.

The three parties will jointly develop, operationalise and manage an SEZ-based ecosystem. —*PTI*

EXCISE WAIVER FOR BIOGAS BLENDING TO UNLOCK RS 1 LAKH CRORE CAPITAL: IBA

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

The Indian Biogas Association (IBA) announced on Sunday that the excise duty waiver on Compressed Biogas (CBG) blended with CNG, introduced in the Union Budget 2026, could unlock Rs 1 lakh crore in new investment. The policy shift is described as a critical milestone in India's transition toward its 2070 Net Zero target.

The excise waiver fixes a long-standing imbalance: CBG is a renewable fuel that is better for the environment, but it was taxed the same way as CNG. For consumers, it means prices stay the same or reduce. For producers, it means guaranteed sales and bankable revenue streams.

On the climate front, CBG cuts greenhouse gas emissions by 70-90 per cent over its whole life cycle, especially when made from agricultural waste. A 10 per cent blend could lower emissions by 12-15 million tons of CO2-equivalent every year.

India's CBG potential is estimated at about 60 million tonnes per year, based on organic wastes like paddy straw, press mud, municipal solid waste, and dung from cattle. —*PTI*

Israel aims to attract 69,000 Indian tourists by 2027

MUMBAI, 22 FEB

Israel expects Indian tourist numbers to return to 2019 levels — approximately 69,000 — by 2027, a senior official from the Israel Ministry of Tourism stated. Following the dual blows of the COVID-19 pandemic and the October 2023 conflict with Hamas, which led to suspended flights to the country.

New air connectivity is central to the recovery plan. Israir Airlines plans to launch direct flights from Tel Aviv to Delhi and Mumbai by April 2026, said Galit Hoffman, Consul - Tourism Affairs, India.

Arkia Airlines is also exploring direct flights to Goa, Kochi, and Mumbai, while Air India already directly connects Delhi and Tel Aviv, with a Mumbai route expected later this year. Promotions are currently focused on metro and Tier I cities in India. Israel offers e-visas, including family permits. —*PTI*

Embraer plans to make KC-390 aircraft in India

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Brazilian aerospace giant Embraer on Sunday signaled its desire to set up a major production hub for its KC-390 Millennium aircraft to support the broader Asia-Pacific market.

Embraer's President and CEO Francisco Gomes Neto pitched KC-390 Millennium as the "best" option for India, leveraging a wave of NATO acquisitions to position the plane as the new 'global benchmark' for tactical airlift.

If awarded the Indian contract, the company will turn India into its primary production hub for aircraft to support the Asia-Pacific market.

The company is eyeing to set up an exclusive regional maintenance, repair, and overhaul hub for KC-390 operators in India while looking at a long-term symbiotic relationship with the country in both defence and civilian aerospace sectors.

Neto said the KC-390 Millennium is a better fit for the future needs of modern air forces as it is a new generation multi-mission transport and aerial refuelling aircraft.

- Embraer's President and CEO Francisco Gomes Neto pitched KC-390 Millennium as the "best" option for India.

In 2022, the Indian Air Force issued a Request for Information (RFI) to purchase medium transport aircraft (MTA) to replace its ageing fleet of Soviet-era AN-32 and IL-76 planes. —*PTI*

India can be key Asia Pacific data centre hub: Deloitte

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

India could emerge as a key data centre hub in the Asia Pacific if it addresses power and grid challenges while aligning renewable energy with rapid digital growth, according to a Deloitte report presented at the India AI Impact Summit.

The country accounts for nearly 20 per cent of global data consumption but hosts less than 5 per cent of the world's data centres, highlighting significant growth potential. Structural advantages such as lower land and construction costs, competitive power tariffs, and a large AI-skilled workforce position India favourably.

Policy support is also strengthening, with the 2026–27 Budget offering a tax holiday until 2047 for foreign cloud service providers and incentives for data centre investment.

Asia Pacific is projected to attract USD 800 billion in investment in data centres by 2030. India's capacity is expected to grow from 1.5 GW in 2025 to 8–10 GW by 2030, with AI-driven demand potentially raising electricity use.

Deloitte recommends accelerating renewable integration, expansion of long-term green power agreements, upgrading transmission networks, and creating Data Centre Economic Zones that are power-ready. —*PTI*

PROGRESSIVE EXCISE POLICY

Beer industry invests Rs 5,500 cr in UP greenfield units

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

The brewing industry will invest around Rs 5,500 crore in Uttar Pradesh on setting up of greenfield units and its ancilleries, the Brewers' Association of India (BAI) said.

BAI welcomed the new excise policy announced by the state government, termed it "progressive" and has a "well-balanced approach" for the growth of the industry. It brings more transparency in the licensing and approvals process.

Work on two greenfield breweries costing around Rs 1500 crore is already underway.

- BAI welcomed the new excise policy announced by the state government, termed it "progressive" and has a "well-balanced approach" for the growth of the industry.

"Two major aluminium can production plants, which entail investment of Rs 2,000 crore and a few glass production units worth Rs 2,000 crore are in the pipeline," BAI director general Vinod Giri.

Plans are underway for the malting unit and paper box makers. All these investments will give a major boost to the industry and create jobs in the state.

The recently announced excise policy has maintained taxes on beer, while increasing it marginally on spirits. The overall impact on Indian made foreign liquor prices is going to be around Rs 10 per 180 ml bottle. However, beer prices would remain the same.

"This calibrated approach is expected to encourage consumption of high-quality products with lower alcohol content like beer without jeopardising the state government's tax revenues. While there has been a marginal hike in the consumer prices of hard liquor, beverages with low alcohol content like beer have been spared," said Giri.

This approach will not disrupt the liquor industry.—*PTI*

T20 WC: Jacks & Archer power England to a sensational win

Sri Lanka bowled out of Super 8 for 95 runs in 16.4 overs

PALLEKELE, 22 FEB

England players celebrate victory against Sri Lanka; (inset) Phil Salt – *PTI*

The pace-spin duo of Jofra Archer and Will Jacks tore through Sri Lanka's top-order after Phil Salt's 40-ball 62 to set up a sensational 51-run win for England in an eventful Super Eights fixture of the T20 World Cup here on Sunday.

After left-arm spinner Dunith Wellalage (3/26) did the star turn for a disciplined Sri Lankan attack to limit a scratchy England to 146 for nine, the islanders seemed to have the match under control.

But speedster Jofra and off-spinner all-rounder Jacks turned the game on its head in the second half, leaving Sri Lanka tottering at 34 for five in the sixth over in a total domination of the powerplay. Sri Lanka were eventually bowled out for 95 in 16.4 overs.

Jacks returned fine figures of 3/22 in four measly overs, while Archer ended with 2/20 in three overs, and they were well supported by Liam Dawson (2/27 in 4 overs) and Adil Rashid (2/13 in 3.4 overs) as they wrapped up the lower-order and tail.

Earlier, having struggled in the group-stage games, England's batters' start to the second phase of the showpiece was in stark contrast to captain Brook's assertion of playing aggressive cricket in the Super Eights.

Meanwhile, Salt, who has survived the powerplay for the first time in the tournament, played some fine shots, including a six over extra cover off Wellalage and a maximum over fine leg against Chameera, and raced to his half-century in 36 balls.

Brief Scores:

England: 146/9; 20 overs (Phil Salt 62; Dunith Wellalage 3/26; Maheesh Theekshana 2/21, Dilshan Madushanka 2/25).

Sri Lanka: 95 all out in 16.4 overs (Will Jacks 3/22; Liam Dawson 2/27, Jofra Archer 2/20, Adil Rashid 2/13).

A remarkably assured West Indies will be wary of Zimbabwe's steely resolve when the two unbeaten teams face off in a vital T20 World Cup Super Eight clash here on Monday. Both the West Indies and Zimbabwe topped their respective groups in the first round, but the job is far from finished for them as sterner challenges lie ahead.

For the two-time champions, the West Indies, it will be another test of their self-assured approach in a format they truly thrive in and bring a flair which perhaps no other team does. Daren Sammy's troops have rallied well to the call of creating their own "little piece of history," but consistency and rising up to the occasion would be paramount. With four wins on the trot, the West Indies have ensured their series defeats in as many as seven bilateral affairs in the lead-up to the T20 World Cup are a matter ofthe past. The match starts at 7:00 pm IST —*PTI*

Alcaraz wins Qatar Open, thrashes Fils in an hour

DUBAI, 22 FEB

Carlos Alcaraz beat Arthur Fils 6-2, 6-1 – *X/QATAR OPEN*

Carlos Alcaraz was at his devastating best on Saturday night as he claimed the Qatar Open title with a ruthless 6-2, 6-1 win over Arthur Fils. The seven-time Grand Slam champion needed just over 50 minutes to see off his French opponent and claim the 26th title of his career. Following Australian Open success earlier this month, completing his career Grand Slam at just 22 years of age, Alcaraz backed it up by storming to the title in Doha in his first tournament back since Melbourne and extending his match-winning streak to 12.

"I came this year hungry for more," said Alcaraz.

"I think after every tournament, we just have to set new goals. I'm just really happy and proud of everything I have done with my team on and off the court.

"It's been a really strong start to the year. It wasn't easy... I had to be strong mentally with my team. I'm just playing great tennis, and I'm really happy about this week. This trophy means a lot to me."

For 40th-ranked Fils, returning gradually to action after a lengthy injury absence, the Spanish world number one was a step too far at the end of a fine week in which he recorded wins over top-10 seeds Jakub Mensik and Jiri Lehecka.

The run to his first tour-level final since Tokyo in 2024 will propel the former world number 14 up to 33 in the next ATP rankings.

"It's been eight long months with my injury," said Fils.

"So in a time like this, you just have to think about the last eight months when I was struggling, not playing tennis. I just want to thank my team... Today was not the day, but I think we did a hell of a job."

. —*PTI*

-PTI

Sixth Khelo India Winter Games to begin in Gulmarg

SRINAGAR, 22 FEB

The famous winter destination of Gulmarg in Jammu and Kashmir is decked up to host the sixth Khelo India Winter Games (KIWG) in which over 400 athletes will participate. The officials on Saturday said all arrangements have been put in place for the four-day event from Monday at a famous ski resort in north Kashmir's Baramulla district. The event will be flagged off by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha. Secretary of the J-K Sports Council, Nuzhat Gul, said the registration process has been completed. Participants from 30 states and UTs have registered, and 400 athletes are participating in the games. There is a good snow cover (in Gulmarg), and we hope the weather supports us," Gul said. The first leg of KIWG for ice events was held in Ladakh's Leh, from January 20 to 26 this year, while the second leg of the games, for snow events, is being held at Gulmarg from February 23 to 26. All six editions have been held in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh..—*PTI*

-X/@OLYMPIC

Laura Nolte secures Olympic bobsled gold

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, 22 FEB

Germany's Laura Nolte didn't let this lead get away. She's golden, again. And Kaillie Humphries Armbruster of the U.S. has a new favorite number six, as in the number of Olympic bobsled medals now in her collection. Nolte is now the back-to-back two-woman Olympic bobsled champion, holding off teammate Lisa Buckwitz to grab gold at the Milan Cortina Games on Saturday night. Nolte the winner of the last four World Cup two-woman titles cemented her status as the sport's current queen, teaming with Deborah Levi to win her second consecutive two-woman gold medal by finishing four runs in 3 minutes, 48.46 seconds. Levi was in her sled for the golden ride in 2022 as well. It means a lot, and even to defend it together as a team again is so cool.—*PTI*

We just want to dominate world cricket: Mandhana

ADELAIDE, 22 FEB

Indian women's team wants to stay at the top and dominate world cricket consistently, said vice-captain Smriti Mandhana.

Riding high on their maiden 50-over World Cup triumph, the Women in Blue have now set their sights on winning the T20 World Cup later this year.

They began the year with a T20 series win against Australia, their first series triumph over the formidable rivals in a decade.

"This Indian team is something that we have spoken about is trying to be consistent. Don't think about opposition or what's happened in the past. So we've beaten this and that. I feel that's not very important now," Mandhana said on BCCI.tv "I think we are on the verge of a transition where we want to dominate world cricket. And whoever we beat, wherever we beat, that doesn't matter. We just want to be consistent in beating them and being at the top," she added. In the series-deciding third T20, Mandhana played a match-setting 82 and, alongside Jemimah, who contributed 59, forged a 121-run partnership that propelled India to 176 for 6 before the bowlers stifled Australia for 159 for 9. "I mean, I really loved Adelaide as a city, even before playing here. And yeah, it's just very peaceful, nice. I mean, a few Aussies will be very happy when I say that it's the best city in Australia, and actually, I find it the best city in Australia."

The women's T20 World Cup is slated to be held in England and Wales from 12 June to 5 July.

"This year is a T20 year. Last year was a one-day year where we played a lot of one-day cricket. —*PTI*

ASIA CUP RISING STARS TITLE

India A beats Bangladesh A

BANGKOK, 22 FEB

India A defended its ACC Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars title, beating Bangladesh A by 46 runs in the final, which took place at the Terdthai Cricket Ground in Bangkok, Thailand, on Sunday.

The Radha Yadav-led side successfully defended the 135-run target to claim the second Rising Stars title in as many editions of the tournament.

Tejal Hasabnis starred with the bat, scoring a 34-ball 51, which included three fours and two sixes. She combined with the skipper for an important 69-run partnership for the fifth wicket, helping India stabilise well after losing quick wickets at the start.

Bangladesh A skipper Fahim Khatun picked a four-wicket haul to keep her side firmly in the game, with plenty of support from the spinners. In reply, the Indian bowlers dominated proceedings in the second half. Only one Bangladesh batter, Shamima Sultana, managed to touch 20, while others had very brief stays. —*PTI*

DHONI IS AVAILABLE BUT MAY NOT PLAY ALL GAMES FOR CSK

AHMEDABAD, 22 FEB

The perennial question around MS Dhoni's future resurfaced once again as the Indian Premier League caravan readies for the 2026 season will the iconic former skipper feature in all matches for Chennai Super Kings this year?Dhoni, who will turn 45 later this year, will be available for CSK for the upcoming IPL season, a top franchise source confirmed.

However, with CSK's prize transfer, Sanju Samson now in the ranks, it is unlikely that the legendary former India captain would play all the league games."We can confirm this much that he is coming to Chennai and has confirmed his availability for the season," a top CSK source told PTI on condition of anonymity."Whether he will play all games or not is something we can't say at the moment," the source added. —*PTI*

NORTHEAST UNITED HOLD BENGALURU FC TO PULSATING 1-1 DRAW

BENGALURU, 22 FEB

Bengaluru FC were held to a 1-1 draw by NorthEast United FC in their Indian Super League match here on Sunday.

The Blues took a first-half lead through Braian Sanchez in the 18th minute, but the Highlanders responded after the break through Lalrinzuala in the 68th minute.

NorthEast United head coach Juan Pedro Benali made one change, bringing in Robin Yadav in defence for Redeem Tlang as they lined up in a 4-2-3-1 formation.

Bengaluru FC head coach Renedy Singh also made a defensive change, introducing Takhellambam Bungson Singh for Rahul Bheke.

The match began at a fast pace.

NorthEast United's Parthib Gogoi tested Gurpreet Singh Sandhu inside the opening minute, and Jithin Madathil Subran followed with a blocked effort. Andy Rodríguez then delivered a teasing corner that Míchel Zabaco headed against the woodwork.

Despite NorthEast United's early pressure, it was Bengaluru who struck first. Ashique Kuruniyan released Braian on the left. The Argentine cut inside and drilled a right-footed shot into the bottom corner from outside the box.

KANE HELPS BAYERN EXTEND BUNDESLIGA LEAD

BERLIN, 22 FEB

Harry Kane scored twice but conceded a penalty as Bayern Munich held on to beat Eintracht Frankfurt 3-2 to extend its Bundesliga lead.

Borussia Dortmund failed to keep pace as it was held 2-2 at Leipzig in the late game. Fábio Silva scored in stoppage time for Dortmund to salvage a point before it faces Bayern at home in "der Klassiker" next Saturday.

But Bayern's win means Dortmund has fallen eight points behind the defending champion, and that it will take an unlikely collapse from Vincent Kompany's team in the final 11 rounds to stop the Bavarian powerhouse from celebrating again. Bayern has won 12 of the last 13 titles since Dortmund won back-to-back titles in 2012.

Aleksandar Pavlovic scored early against Frankfurt, and Bayern seemed to be cruising when Kane scored his league-leading 27th and 28th goals of the season, one in each half.

The England star is used to converting penalties but ended up conceding one for a foul on Oscar Höjlund with some 15 minutes of normal time remaining. Jonathan Burkardt duly pulled one back from the spot in the 77th, and Arnaud Kalimuendo capitalized on a mix-up between Joshua Kimmich and Kim Min-jae to set up a nervy finale in the 86th.—*PTI*

India loses to Australia in shootout after 2-2 draw

HOBART, 22 FEB

India suffered a narrow 4-5 penalty shootout loss against host Australia in their FIH Pro League 2025-26 clash at the Tasmania Hockey Centre in Hobart on Sunday.

The two sides were tied at 2-2 after full time, with Amit Rohidas (15') and Jugraj Singh (43') putting India in front before a brace from Joel Rintala (47', 56') helped Australia get back on level terms.

It was a spirited effort from India as it stayed solid at the back and grew into the game to pile some pressure on Australia. India was rewarded with a penalty corner late in the first quarter and made the most of it as Rohidas converted his dragflick to give it a 1-0 lead.

Despite Australia dominating proceedings, the Indian defence remained resolute, and the discipline bore fruit in the third quarter when Jugraj converted a powerful dragflick from a penalty corner to double the lead.

However, the host managed to reduce the deficit early in the fourth quarter, with Rintala scoring from a penalty corner. —*PTI*

Vaishnavi Adkar's fairytale run comes to an end at ITF B'luru Open

BENGALURU, 22 FEB

Vaishnavi Adkar was denied a fairytale ending at the ITF Women's Bengaluru Open, a USD 100,000 event, as she went down in a straight set to third seed Hanne Vandewinkel in the final on Sunday.

Vaishnavi, the 21-year-old wildcard currently ranked 690 in the world, lost 6-0, 6-1 in 56 minutes to Belgian World No. 124 Vandewinkel at the S.M. Krishna Stadium.

Nevertheless, the Indian, who has previously won one USD 15,000 event in Ahmedabad in 2024, had a career-changing week. After beating 19-year-old compatriot Shruti Ahlawat in the opening round, she stunned Japan's Mai Hontama (World No. 220), Australia's Taylah Preston (World No. 148), and Thailand's Lanlana Tararudee (World No. 126) to book her spot in the final.

Vaishnavi Adkar's excellent run at the ITF Bengaluru Open came to an end in the final against Hanne Vandewinkel –*PTI*

As a result of her run in Bengaluru, World University Games bronze medallist Vaishnavi has gained 65 ranking points and risen to 466 in the live WTA Rankings, becoming India's No. 2 behind Sahaja Yamalapalli (World No. 397). —*PTI*

MESSI'S FIRST OFFICIAL GAME OF 2026

Will Messi's messy MLS show impact WC?

LOS ANGELES, 22 FEB

Following LAFC's third goal on Saturday night, which sent most of the 75,600+ in attendance into a frenzy at the LA Coliseum, a fan with an Argentina jersey rushed onto the field and immediately sprinted towards Inter Miami superstar Lionel Messi.

The scene is a common one for any event involving the 2022 World Cup winner, but this time, the celebratory music blasting out was not for him, as Miami was losing 3-0.

Indeed, in Messi's first official game of 2026 with defending MLS Cup champions, the initial pages of the Hollywood script being written for him in another World Cup year didn't exactly go to plan. Ahead of Saturday's marquee MLS opening-weekend match against Son Heung-min's LAFC, there had been doubts that Messi would participate after he suffered a hamstring injury during Miami's preseason friendly in February.

At 38 years old, it was fair to not only worry about his start to the MLS season, but also wonder if this could point to issues this summer's World Cup.

After all, Messi has yet to 100% commit to this summer's tournament with Argentina and has been honest about his fitness being a factor."I would like to be there.

To feel well and to be an important part of helping my national team, if I am there," Messi said, back in October. "I am going to assess that on a day-to-day basis when I start preseason next year with Inter [Miami] and see if I can really be 100%. I'm really eager because it's the World Cup. But, although Miami head coach Javier Mascherano confirmed on Friday that the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner was "training at the same level as the rest of the team all week. —*PTI*

KARKERA WIN NEW DELHI MARATHON

NEW DELHI, 22 FEB

Kartik Karkera dominated the capital's streets to win the 11th New Delhi Marathon and, along with two others, breached the qualifying standard for this year's Asian Games on Sunday.

Completing the 42.2 kilometres in a remarkable time of two hours and thirteen minutes (02:13:10), Mumbai's Karkera comfortably surpassed the qualifying mark for the Asian Games in Japan later this year. A doctor by profession, the 28-year-old had to stave off a concerted bid by Gopi Thonakal (02:13:12) and Man Singh (02:13:15). —*PTI*